



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

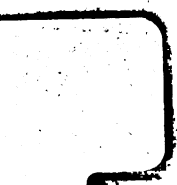
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



The jewel of death

Huen Mee



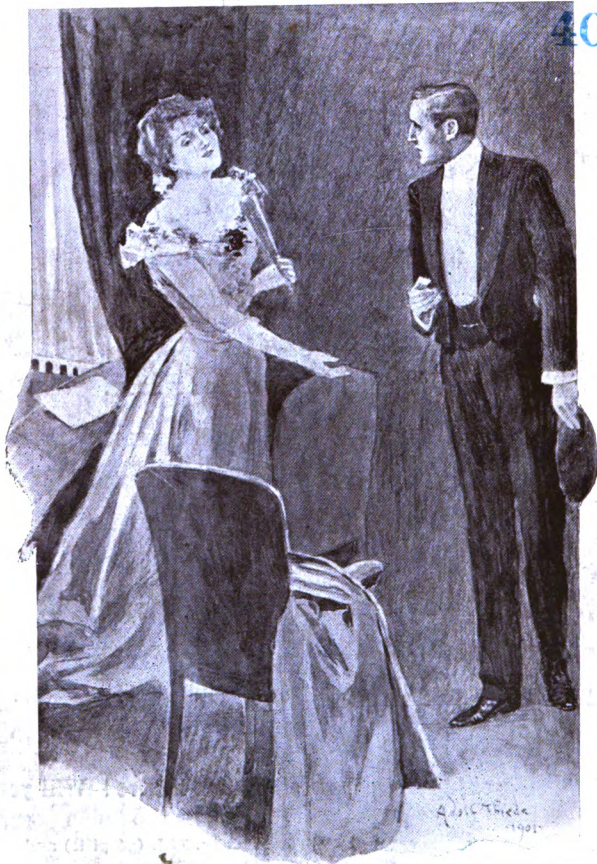
Mee

NCW

PRICE SIXPENCE

THE JEWEL OF DEATH

By Huan Mee



London : Ward, Lock & Co., Ltd.

BEECHAM'S

"Worth a Guinea."

AT THE TOP. BEECHAM PILL

are right at the
They are at the
point of sales—
top in point of me
at the top in the e
of tens of thousands
users. And not without g

BEECHAM'S PILLS
to build up robust health
it than any other medicin
done this, and are continua
thousands all over the worl
now and take **BEECHAM'S P**
you will certainly benefit to a

You will soon be "at the top"
and so really enjoy life. Now follow t

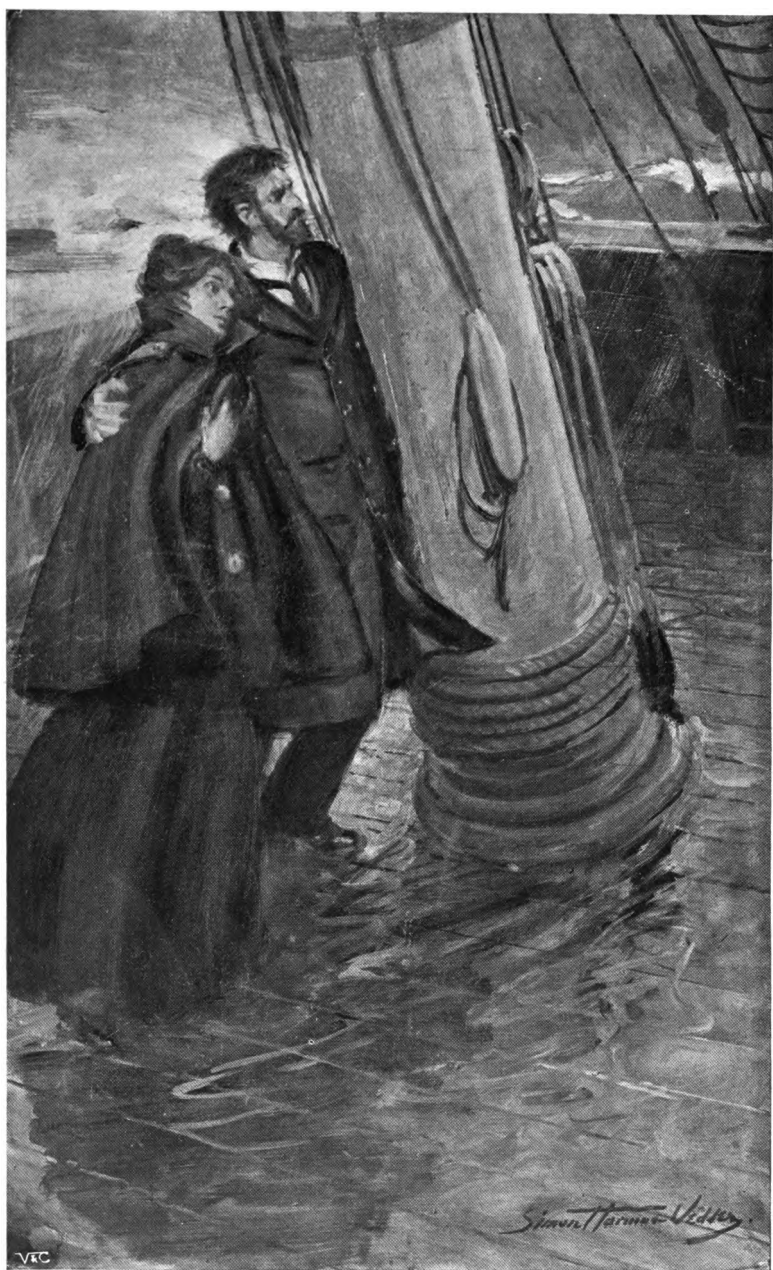
~~~~~  
Beecham's Pills are sold everywhere in Boxes,  
(168 pills), each with full d  
~~~~~

Prepared only by the Proprietor, THOMAS BEE

THE JEWEL OF DEATH

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
LIBRARY

1900



"He placed his arm around her" (page 57).

The Jewel of Death

[Frontispiece.]

THE JEWEL OF DEATH

BY
H U A N M E E

AUTHOR OF "WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS," "WEAVING THE WEB,"
ETC.

NEW YORK
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

ILLUSTRATED

LONDON
WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED

1905
M.C.C.

408150

WOLFF V. 30
310051
V. 3000

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I FUGITIVES	7
II THE JEWEL OF DEATH	11
III THE VENGEANCE OF SPERCIA ZANCHEZ	15
IV THE FIGHT IN THE HILLS	18
V TO BE SHOT AT DAWN	22
VI UNTIL TO-MORROW	25
VII A LAST CIGAR	29
VIII AN ENGLISHMAN'S OATH	33
IX THE AWAKENING	36
X FACE TO FACE	39
XI CHI MIN'S OPIUM DEN	43
XII PHYLLIS STANTON	48
XIII THE DOOMED SHIP	50
XIV DESERTED	54
XV BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH	57
XVI MADEIRA	61
XVII MORE THAN THE WHOLE WORLD	65
XVIII "I SHOOT AT SIGHT"	68
XIX HOMEWARD BOUND	72
XX PHYLLIS AWAKENS	75
XXI "WAS IT A DREAM?"	79
XXII BACK FROM THE DEAD	82
XXIII ON THE TRACK	86
XXIV ALFRED BRAND'S DISCOVERY	89
XXV BUYING A LIFE	93

v

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXVI STEPHEN HARRINGTON'S REVENGE	96
XXVII ALFRED BRAND TRIUMPHS	100
XXVIII THE PRICE OF FREEDOM	103
XXIX PHYLLIS CONSENTS	107
XXX THE IRREVOCABLE STEP	111
XXXI RALPH REGAINS HIS LIBERTY	115
XXXII FROM LIGHT TO DARKNESS	118
XXXIII AND FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT	122
XXXIV HOME	126

THE JEWEL OF DEATH

CHAPTER I

FUGITIVES

"SPUR ! For the love of Heaven, spur ! Spur ! They're within range."

"Crack ! Crack !—ping !"

"Spur, I tell you. For God's sake, spur !" the man cried again, and brought his whip down with a slash upon the neck of the jaded worn-out horse. "Give me the child, Grace, and ride for your life !"

They plunged onward, and the thud of hoofs behind them grew ever louder and louder, nearer and nearer.

"Give me the child !" he repeated.

"No, no," the woman answered, "she is better where she is." And again she coaxed her exhausted steed forward, and hugged her burden closer to her breast.

Crack—crack—crack—rang out the snap of the rifles. Nearer this time. The bullets whistled by them, and flung up a shower of sand as they buried themselves in the dusty roadway.

"On, on," the man urged in gasps ; "spur for your lives," and the four horses, foam-flecked, panting, and steaming, strained and struggled onwards under the encouragement of rein and spur.

"Shall we be taken ?" the woman asked, with half a sob, looking over her shoulder to see if their pursuers yet gained upon them.

One of the riders followed her glance, and swiftly measured the distance.

"I fear so. They're gaining rapidly."

The sun blazed down pitilessly. The heavens above were as relentless as their pursuers. The sky was as burnished steel, and clouds of choking dust spread about them at every beat of their horses' hoofs.

For over an hour this chase had gone on, as now. For over an hour, and yet at each minute those who glanced back could see that the troopers steadily and relentlessly gained upon them.

At first, with a good start, they had distanced those who sought to capture them, and held the advantage for a time. Safety seemed to stretch out her arms to welcome them, freedom seemed hovering around them, when trivialities had brought delays ; and now their enemies were close at hand, the sharp crack of their rifles becoming nearer and nearer, and the bullets, whistling by, told them that they were within range, and all that was needed was a steady hand to finish everything.

The man who urged his wife to spur, and give him the child, was as fine and broad-shouldered a Britisher as ever rode a horse, and whose courage had been tried in many a sorer plight than this. He had looked death in the face many a time, and never feared it. For himself he cared nothing ; for those who take great risks must run great dangers, and when the stakes are high, the gambler must be prepared to win or lose them. If fate had decreed that he should lose, Dick

Stanton would have lost with a good grace; but it was not only himself now. Would to God it were, he thought, knowing he fought a hopeless battle.

Would that he could turn, and, meeting his pursuers in the open, die at least by a wound in the breast, and not in the back.

But now he was not alone, and so, bending over his horse, and crying as loud as his cracking lips would allow him, still he urged them onwards.

"Stoop over your horses! Spur!"

Side by side with Stanton and his wife rode two others; two wild, reckless Englishmen, little more than boys. Ralph Chesleigh and Stephen Harrington, young dare-devils who, for the mere love of excitement and adventure, had thrown their lot in with his, to win to lose—and it looked very much like losing.

Urged by whip and spur, by voice and knee, by encouragement and threat, the wiry South American horses still sped onwards; and on, swifter behind them, came the pursuers.

"No surrender!" had ever been Dick Stanton's motto, and this day it must be the same.

Flight, because flight was necessary against over-whelming odds. Escape, if possible; if not, then, at least, some should answer for it.

Once, with his revolver in his hand, he looked behind and hesitated—wondered if he should turn back and meet them, as he longed to; but a glance at the woman who rode by his side, her hair streaming around her shoulders—at the sobbing, frightened child clasped within her arms, decided him. With a sigh he cursed himself for bringing this upon them; but the chase could not last much longer—the end must come, and they would face it all together.

Ambition—it had been the bane of his life; and now he realized it. Now, as they fled, he cursed the

day that his restless ambition had made him a leader of men against the powers that governed—what the world called a rebel.

He had been the very life and soul of the insurrection that had attempted to overthrow the Government of Señor Sesta, the President of Santa Teresa, and now the Government troops chased him across the country.

That this Spanish-American Government was more corrupt than even most of its class availed him nothing now. That he, as an Englishman, revolted, and rightly revolted, against the thieving knavery of those who pretended to administer, was nothing too. He was an outcast rebel, fleeing for his life. Had he been successful, he would have been the popular President, the beloved of the people, the idol of the rough, irregular army of Santa Teresa.

But he had failed. The people execrated him for his futile disturbance of their pursuits, the troops chased him because the President demanded it.

He fled, and she rode by his side.

His wife! The woman whom, only a short while back, he had fancied would be the most honoured in Santa Teresa.

He remembered now, as he looked at her, that only a week since he, at the head of his then victorious insurgents, had chased a body of the Government troops like this, and shot them as they rode.

Crack!—crack!

"God! they've hit me."

Dick Stanton reeled in his saddle, and caught at his horse's mane. In a paroxysm of agony his feet flung themselves from the stirrups, and a shrieking cough burst from the depths of his brawny chest.

"It's nothing," he gasped, wiping his sleeve across his lips.

"Dick, dear, they've killed you," she moaned, and caught him by the shoulders.

"Yes, old girl, that's it. They've done me. Through the lungs."

He swayed in her grasp.

"The baby—spur—for God's —" He lurched, sprang backwards, and rolled from his horse.

With a shriek she pulled at the reins, but her companions caught her arms, and urged the tired beast on again.

"Let me get down. Let me go to him."

"You can do no good. Remember his last words, and save your child."

Again the three struggled onward, and the riderless horse galloped with them.

But all was over. Another sharp crack, and Grace Stanton's horse stumbled and fell. Ralph caught her in his arms, and together they stood, awaiting capture.

On came the President's troops, the choking clouds of dust almost hiding them. Those who waited could hear their wild shouts of victory, mingling with the oaths with which they goaded on their jaded horses.

They reached the body lying upon the roadway, swerved by one common impulse, and passed it; all save one man, who reined in his steed, and stood a sentinel beside the dead.

Then the troop divided; one half standing around the two, the other furiously spurring on again, in continued pursuit of that man riding ahead; for Stephen Harrington had not paused when Grace Stanton's horse was shot, but had ridden madly ahead, caring for nothing save his own life.

So the little group waited in the blazing sun; waited only a few hundred yards from the body of Dick Stanton, dead as his own fruitless ambitions; and away, in the distance, under the dancing heat, Stephen Harrington urged on his hopeless flight.

The wearied horses, foam-flecked and dust-covered, breathed heavily, and hung their heads; and the troopers, shielding their eyes with their hands, watched with feverish

interest the chase that could have but one finality.

The end was near. The foremost trooper raised his rifle sharply to his shoulders; the sound of the report rang in the ears of the listeners, and at the very second Harrington's horse plunged forward, and rolled over on the ground.

Then the pursuers' horses' heads were turned again, and a tight knot rode slowly back.

A knot of wearied men and beaten horses, and in their midst was Stephen Harrington.

"Well, Stanton's done for," one of the troopers brutally exclaimed, turning his eye from the approaching group. "I picked him off, straight as a die."

"You shot him then, did you, you cursed fool?" a voice exclaimed fiercely, and a sledge-hammer blow upon the temple knocked the man from his horse with a thud.

"You shot him, did you, you fool?" the man fiercely cried again. "Then you'll have to pay for it. It was his secret we wanted first, then his life. This Golden River he used to brag of. Perhaps you know its whereabouts?" he continued, turning to Ralph Chesleigh.

"I know no more than you, and that is what Stanton said, that he knew the location of a stream literally covered in its bed with nuggets."

"Perhaps you will give the Government the information, in exchange for your life."

"I have told you," Ralph angrily repeated, "I know nothing of it—Stanton kept the secret to himself, and it died with him."

"He would have given it up if that fool had not shot him," the captain of the troop exclaimed, grimly.

"I think not. You do not know what Englishmen are like, Spercia Zanchez."

The man laughed scornfully, and looked down at Ralph Chesleigh.

"He would not have been the first Englishman I had induced to

give up his secret. Spaniards have effective methods of gaining secrets. If you know anything, I think I shall be able to persuade you to tell me all."

There was an insolent look of brutal triumph upon the coarse features of the captain, and with exaggerated mock politeness he turned to Grace Stanton, and, whispering an endearing phrase in Spanish, bowed until his swarthy features touched the neck of his horse.

The girl's face grew scarlet, and then as white as death. The child, although only judging the world from three or four short years, seemed to share in the dread of the dark, vicious face that looked down upon her, for she sighed uneasily, and crept closer to her mother.

"We meet after many years, Grace," exclaimed Zanchez, "and I have thought often of you."

The woman answered not a word, only rocked herself to and fro, soothing the troubled child, and gazed past the captain to that figure prone upon the roadway.

She was silent with the horror that had seized her at the death of the man she loved, silent with the terrible loneliness of her position, the blank that had fallen upon her life. Silent with a great dread of this man who had pursued her with his wolfish admiration in the past; who had vowed vengeance when she scornfully refused him in the days gone by, and into whose power fate had cast her now.

She was utterly and hopelessly in his power. The arms that would have sheltered her were still; and terror deprived her of all power of speech. She could only think coldly, despairing of her life.

Too well she, as all others, knew the character of the Spanish-American captain Spencia Zanchez. A man who never did a good action in the whole of his blood-thirsty career; a man who never forgot and never forgave; and beneath his smiling lips and honeyed

tones there lurked, she knew, revenge.

Would to God, she thought, that she were lying dead beside her husband, rather than at the mercy of this man who rode his horse beside her.

They reached the body of Dick Stanton, and she dropped to the ground, and flung herself down beside it.

"You will not leave him here," she cried beseechingly. "He has done you no harm, and he is dead. You will have him buried."

"Get on your horse," Zanchez curtly exclaimed, and a slight murmur of dissent seemed to rise from the troopers behind him.

With his hand upon the back of his saddle, he wheeled round, gazed along the lines, and each man's eyes drooped as they met those of the captain—the man whom history told had shot a trooper in his ranks who dared to dispute his word.

"Mount your horse!"

"You cannot be so brutal," she said wildly. "I have friends; they will carry the body of the man who was their friend, sooner than he should be left like a dog upon the roadside."

"Mount your horse. That man is like your own past life—dead."

She looked into his face, as though she should scarce believe his brutality.

"We are soldiers, not grave-diggers. Mount your horse, and send the first fool back we meet!"

She still stood looking at him, and, springing from his saddle, he caught her in his arms, and flung her on to her horse.

"Hold her there," he cried; and sprang on to his own.

"Forward!"

CHAPTER II

THE JEWEL OF DEATH

"It does my heart good to be near you once again, Grace," exclaimed Zanchez, edging his horse close to the side of hers.

She turned her white, tear-stained face up to his, and her voice trembled as she spoke.

"Have you not done enough without taunting a defenceless woman? You've shot the man I love——"

"Aye! Shot him as he deserved, and turned you into the prettiest widow in South America."

He placed his hand with a gesture of freedom upon her arm.

"Never you mind, Grace," he laughed. "You'll forget all about it in a week. You're too pretty to go a-begging for long. I shall marry you myself when you've got over this little fit of temper."

"You coward!" she cried, drawing away from him, so swiftly that her horse reared.

The Spanish captain caught at the reins of her horse, and cut viciously at his neck with his riding whip until the animal reared with pain. Then with a jeering laugh he turned to Grace Stanton again.

"That's how we tame unruly spirits here," he cried. "That horse tried to bite me once years ago, and I never gave him a chance of forgetting it. Do you remember the scorn upon your face when you refused to marry me, because of that fool who now lies yonder staring up at the sky? A Spanish-American was not good enough for you. You had difficulty in repressing your smiles."

"It is not true," she answered, looking into the face of the child lying in her arms. "I did not smile; I could not marry you because I did not love you."

"And I, Spercia Zanchez, had to go like a beaten cur," he cried fiercely. "I had to go because a girl had said, 'You shall not have

your way.' Ha! But times have changed now, Grace. You will not say me nay now. You will rest in my arms and raise those lips that used to smile so scornfully upon me, entreating my caresses."

He caught her round the waist and drew her towards him, and a dull gleam shone in her eyes.

"You coward!" she panted as she pushed him from her with the hand that was free. "You coward!"

"You'll kiss me now, Grace," he cried again, as he held her tightly and bent his lips to hers; and then swiftly he drew back with a curse, for, nerved by the loathing of him and stung to madness by his taunts, the girl clenched her fist and struck him twice upon his jeering lips.

A trooper half chuckled behind him, and then retreated in fear at the hellish rage in the face of Zanchez as for a second he turned towards her.

The captain's whole body was trembling with fury, his bronzed face turned livid in the sunlight. He, Spercia Zanchez, had been struck by a woman, struck before his whole troop.

His eyes flashed defiance and deadly hatred, and he raised his whip as though to slash her across the face; then with a callous laugh of triumph, before she could guess his intention, he tore the child from her arms and flung it into a clump of bushes by the roadside.

"Oh, my God! My baby!" she shrieked; and he caught her savagely and held her on her horse.

"Yell as you like, you little fiend. I'll make you remember the day you struck me."

"Oh, have mercy, Zanchez, have mercy! I will marry you. Before God I swear it. Give me back my baby."

"It's too late," he jeered. "On, caramba!" and then the words stuck in his throat. Two hands gripped his neck from behind,

two thumbs forced themselves into his windpipe.

Ralph Chesleigh had broken from the men who rode on either side of him, and, digging his spurs into the flanks of his horse, scattered the troopers right and left and seized the Spanish captain by the throat.

With a herculean twist Zanchez turned and saw his assailant.

"Stand clear," he shouted to the troopers who had caught Ralph by the shoulders. "Stand clear. By heaven, I'll have the man shot who interferes with my affair."

With the thud of a battering ram he droye his elbow into Ralph's chest, and then in a second the position was reversed and he held the Englishman like a child within his grip.

Ralph had fought for the right, but might prevailed, for right could not increase the breadth of his shoulders or the depth of his chest. He was still a stripling and Spertia Zanchez a giant.

The captain held him in his grasp and laughed in his face; and the youngster flushed with wounded pride to be held so, like a petulant child, before the eyes of her he had tried to save.

"You're an impetuous boy," Zanchez said reprovingly; and the troopers shrieked with merriment at the wit of the chief. "If an attack from the rear meant anything to me, I should have been dead years ago, for that is the only way foes dare attack me."

Ralph fancied that he felt a momentary relaxation of the man's grip, and suddenly wrenched; but his captor shook his head and laughed.

"Don't do that, you young fool," he jerked out savagely; "as I hold you now I could throw you from your horse and spatter your brains upon the roadway."

He dragged him from his saddle and then, as the woman with a shriek placed her hands before her

eyes, he softly placed him upon his feet.

"Walk, my lad, for a while," he exclaimed in contempt. "Walk and keep cool. March!"

"Zanchez, my little girl, my baby. You will not leave her to starve, to die here?"

"March, curse you, march!" he yelled to the troopers, who, thoughtless dare-devils as they were, seemed to hesitate at such a deed as this

"March!"

And they moved forward with the shrieking, sobbing woman in their midst, Spertia Zanchez leading the troop, with a cigar between his teeth, ever and anon breaking into a snatch of a Spanish song of revelry; and gradually, as the troopers caught up the refrain and shouted it together, Grace Stanton's hysterical sobs were drowned in their ribald chorus.

"Halt!—Come out of there, or I'll shoot you as you stand."

It was Zanchez who spoke, and he held his rifle pointing towards an undergrowth of tangled bushes.

"Well, who are you?" he demanded, as two men scrambled sharply into the roadway.

"English ranchers, captain," one of the men replied, approaching him; and Ralph edged slowly and cautiously towards the other, who stood a little apart, and whispered to him.

"Ha!" yelled Zanchez, "supporters of the cursed rebels, I'll be sworn."

"Supporters of no one, captain, except ourselves," the man replied with a curious look at Grace Stanton, leaning white and silent against Zanchez's shoulder.

"Have you seen any of the insurgents?"

"A large body crossed the hill yonder, going west, this morning."

"What hour?"

"Ten, captain."

"Ah! well, remember this, the pair of you. I've a good memory

for faces. If you're caught red-handed, you get short shrift—I'll see to the shooting of you myself. Clear off."

Needing no further urging, the men rapidly departed through the bushes.

"Crossing the hill going west," Zanchez muttered. "Curse it! if they have reached Cufus, they'll annihilate us in the hollow."

He gazed thoughtfully before him, savagely biting the butt of his cigar, and then with a few sharp words divided the party into three.

He at the head of one galloped madly forward along the road; the second, a little to the left, cantered after; while the third, surrounding the three prisoners, kept more to the right and followed at a walk.

"You'd better mount and look after the woman, she's your friend," one of the troopers growled to Ralph, for there seemed to be a little more human nature amongst them directly Zanchez left; and Ralph Chesleigh rode by Grace Stanton's side with his arm around her, while his friend Stephen Harrington bandied jokes and smoked cigars with those about them.

For a moment Ralph almost thought the woman was dead as he gazed into her face; but as they rode a slight shiver came over her, and she opened her eyes and looked in a frightened way around her.

"Oh, my God! my baby," she moaned.

"Hush!" he whispered, and bent down so that his lips almost touched her ear.

"You fainted, and while you were unconscious we passed two Englishmen. One has promised to find Phyllis, and keep her at their ranch until we return."

Her lips moved, but no sound came from them, and she lowered her head and kissed the rough brown hand thrown across her shoulders.

"There, that's all right," he

cried hastily, as he drew his hand away. "In a month or two we shall be free, and we'll all ride back, and see the kid running about like wildfire. I swear we shall have to pay the ranchers her weight in gold before they'll part with her. You know Phyllis has got an engaging way of making herself very easily at home. Don't fret; it will be all right."

And so Ralph Chesleigh kept talking, seeking to turn her mind a little from the events of the day and just to bring even the shadow of a smile upon her tight drawn lips.

"Ralph," she said at last, laying her hand on his, "you have done so much that I hesitate to ask more of you; but English people, far from home, will do anything for their own folk in trouble, won't they?"

"Of course, Grace. I will do anything."

"I know," she said, with a catch in her voice, "that I shall never see Phyllis again, and when dying I want to feel quite sure in my heart that she will be happy—that some one will care for her."

"You are wearied and worn," he answered soothingly. "Tomorrow you will think differently."

"Will you promise, Ralph, just to please and comfort me?"

"Yes," he said tenderly. "I promise that if anything should happen I will return to her and guard her always to the utmost of my power."

"Thank you," she answered softly, pressing his hand, and her eyes spoke what she could not express in words.

"Bend you ear towards me," she said after a moment's pause; and as he did so she whispered, "Sewn into baby's dress lies her father's secret, the exact location of the Golden River. She will be one of the richest women in the world some day, and you will be her guardian. You promise, Ralph?"

"I promise," he answered. "I promise, trusting things may not be as you fear."

There were sudden signs of closing up amongst the troop, and rifles were unslung and held in readiness, as a body of horsemen appeared cantering towards them.

For an instant Ralph's heart beat quicker at the hope of rescue, only to deaden with disappointment as he saw it was their own second company returning.

"You may proceed sharply," the man at the head exclaimed. "Cufus is clear, its people true to the Government, and waiting to give welcome to the victors. Forward!" And briskly they trotted towards the village.

All was bustle and excitement around the few straggling houses of Cufus as the troopers dismounted and prepared to find quarters for the night.

Spercia Zanchez, still seated upon his horse, was giving rapid orders, when the prisoners came in view, as to the disposal of the outposts and the guarding of the village generally against a night attack, and directly he caught sight of them he sprang to the ground and stood hat in hand, bowing with a courtesy too exaggerated to be genuine before Grace Stanton.

"We are compelled to halt here for the night," he said, assisting her carefully from her horse, "it will be my duty to see that everything is done that shall add to your comfort."

"I want none of your courtesies, Spercia Zanchez, and none of your assistance," she cried indignantly. "When we reach Reos the President shall learn from my lips of the cowardly villainy of his captain, who for petty spite ends a victorious campaign with the murder of a babe. The President is a stern man, but he is just, and will avenge me."

Spercia Zanchez smiled a mocking smile of quiet amusement.

"When we are before the Presi-

dent," he said, "you shall speak and I will defend myself. In the meanwhile let it be known to all that I honour you as our illustrious prisoner of war."

He placed his hand in his pocket, and extracting a leather case drew from it an enormous emerald, mounted in heavy gold and attached to a narrow green ribbon.

"Let it be known to you, Grace Stanton," he continued, coming nearer and whispering to her, "let it be known to you that Spercia Zanchez is not the cold-hearted monster that his enemies represent. He can forgive. I can forgive you now for the blow you struck me. Wear this in remembrance of Spercia Zanchez's forgiveness."

There was an insolent undercurrent in the tones of his voice that gave the lie to these honeyed phrases.

With a rapid movement he placed the ribbon around her neck, the jewel resting upon her throat, and tied it tightly behind.

"Take her away," he said, and turned upon his heel.

"Zanchez seems inclined to do the amiable, after all," remarked Stephen Harrington to Ralph as they stood watching.

"There's some devilry in it," Ralph responded sharply. "Did you see the look upon some of the troopers' faces. These Spaniards are all superstitious, and they seemed to fear something in that gift of Zanchez."

"Can't say I noticed it. As a matter of fact, one of the fellows had given me a thundering good cigar, and I didn't trouble about anything else in the world."

"This way, march!" a trooper cried coming up to them. "Here's your quarters. You'll be well guarded; if you try to escape, you'll be shot."

"Right you are," exclaimed Harrington cheerfully. "That's quite a matter of business, but give me another cigar. If you're on guard to-night, come inside, bring

a demi-juan of caña and a pack of cards and I'll play you monte for pesos points."

The man, with a gruff good-night, walked towards the door of the shed, and Ralph caught him by the arm.

"What was that emerald——"

"The Jewel of Death, señor."

"What do you mean?"

The trooper slightly shrugged his shoulders, crossed himself, and passed out.

CHAPTER III

THE VENGEANCE OF SPERCIA ZANCHEZ

IN about half an hour the trooper returned, bringing with him a couple of packs of greasy cards, a dozen of the cigars beloved by Stephen Harrington, and a demi-juan of caña.

He placed them upon the rough wooden bench, which served alike for the purpose of chair and table, and smiled expansively.

"You're a rattling good sort," Ralph exclaimed, handing him half a dozen pesos. "It's a pity you're not on our side."

"The Government troops have food and shelter, señor, and one must live."

"While the rebels pay nothing, eh?"

"They attack the Government, which owes the troops for three years' service, señor."

"And the troops fight in self-protection," Ralph responded, with a laugh. "By the way, Stephen," he said, "I'm not sure that isn't the way to keep the allegiance of the army. Don't pay it. Overthrow the Government, and their claim against it goes with it. They fight for their pay, therefore for the Government."

The three men laughed together, and sipped their caña.

"You'll join us in monte," Stephen suggested to the trooper,

as he arranged the cards upon the bench.

"Your play will be too high, señor," the man answered, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Three years' pay overdue, señor."

"Well, we'll set you up with half a dozen pesos apiece, and then if you clean us out it's your luck."

The man still hesitated, although his eyes gleamed, and fixed themselves upon the cards, ready for the game.

"The position, señor, is awkward," he remarked, at length.

"I play. I win, we will say hundreds of pesos. I drink too much, and sleep. You open the door, and walk out; and to-morrow I am shot. What use a pleasant evening, to be followed by such an unfortunate awakening?"

"You will take our words?"

"Certainly, señor," the man responded, with a touch of Spanish dignity.

"Then we pledge them, eh, Stephen?"

"Yes, for to-night."

"For to-night I take your parole. Salutation, señor. Now for the game."

For half an hour they played on, and the pile in front of the trooper grew steadily.

"What do you reckon they'll do with us to-morrow?" Stephen asked, as he lighted his cigar.

"Caramba!" the man replied placidly, "why trouble? To-morrow will show."

"That's all very well for you, my friend; but I feel rather interested."

"Ah, well, we shall see. Another pesos, señor. My luck is good."

"I don't care much about myself," Ralph Chesleigh interrupted; "but can anything be done for the woman?"

"Nothing, señor; she is doomed."

"To death?"

The man inclined his head.

"Will Zanchez shoot her?"

"Worse. He has laid the evil stone upon her—the Jewel of

Death. I count her hours left upon two of my fingers."

The three sat silent for a few moments.

The flaming light of the resinous torch played upon the bronzed faces of the men, and threw fantastic shadows on the rough walls of the shed, while the air was hot and heavy with the smoky flame.

"Tell me more about this Jewel of Death," Ralph exclaimed.

"Señor, I know but little of its history. They say it is older than the world, that it came from some unknown sphere, and one of the great Spaniards with Pizarro found it in a city which now has vanished. That was the City of the Jewel of Death."

The soldier spoke with awe in his voice, an undercurrent of superstition, as one who told marvels beyond his ken.

"What hanky-panky powers has the thing got?" jerked matter-of-fact Stephen Harrington.

"It is the greatest good, and the greatest evil. It is a talisman of good fortune, a means of death."

"Rot!" Harrington responded, decisively.

"There's magic in it, and Zanchez values it as he does his life. He has only parted with it once before. It was a great lady who wore it then, at Reos. I was on guard, and saw her pass, señores; next morning they told me she was dead. They said that, had she lived, she would have had Zanchez degraded and shot for treason; but she died, señores."

"Most picturesque twaddle," Ralph exclaimed, with a yawn, as he stretched himself.

"But, señor, at one time Zanchez conjured up this city, and showed it to me."

"Oh, did he? Where?"

"In the heavens. The eve of a sultry day, when he and I stood alone upon the parching grassland. Just as the sun sank low in the west, and the after-glow of floating crimson and amber

tinged the clouds, he caught my wrist, and pointed to the sky.

"You shall see my city," he cried, 'the City of the Jewel of Death,' and as I watched it grew before my eyes. A glorious city, with white marble palaces, with domes and graceful minarets, fair, waving palm trees, and streets that flamed with gold. That is the power of Zanchez's jewel, señor."

"A mirage," said Ralph, coldly.

"The captain ought to be a travelling showman," remarked Harrington. "He's got such a wonderful gift for lying."

"Ah! it's an evil stone, señor. It carries good fortune to its owner, and it has brought wealth and power to Zanchez, and death to his enemies. Zanchez will never go to battle without it, for he believes it is that that conquers all his foes for him."

"And you believe this, too?"

"Who shall say, señor? There are many strange things that men cannot understand; and in battle it is always victory for Zanchez."

"The woman cannot be saved?"

The man lowered his voice to a whisper, and glanced over his shoulder.

"By now, señor, she is dead."

The two Englishmen sat looking stonily before them; and the trooper, seeing that thoughts of further play had left them, quietly collected the cards, and placed his winnings in his pocket.

"*Salut! señores, salut y pesos!*" he cried, as he drained his cup, and taking up the smoking torch, walked towards the door.

"*Buenas noches, señores.*"

"*Hasta mañana, amigo.*"

"*Hasta mañana que se duerme muy bien, señores,*" and he passed out and left them.

Left them, and they sat there sleeping by fits and starts, until the long hours of the night passed away, and the silvery dawn palpitating upon the bosom of the east heralded the coming day.

The bugle call awoke the little

village of Cufus to life and activity again, and upon the still morning air came clearly the jingle of chains and bits, the champing of the refreshed steeds, and Ralph and Stephen gladly mingled with the troopers in the bright sunlight.

Everywhere was bustle and preparation, and the stir of departure. Everywhere, save in that one hut where Grace Stanton lay dead.

The parting had been but a few brief hours, and now her soul had floated forth into the great unknown, to join again the one she loved.

Faithful in life, true to him in good fortune and in ill, she had crossed the silent river close behind him.

Spercias Zanchez, mounted upon a jet-black horse, rode swiftly up and down the lines, rapidly giving his orders, fiercely turning to this man and to that as something for a moment displeased him—ruling, as he ever did, by fear.

"Where's the woman?" he demanded, as he caught sight of Ralph and Stephen.

"In the hut yonder, captain," a trooper answered.

"Fetch her."

The man strode off, and Zanchez, puffing at his cigar, waited, slashing at the top of his boots meanwhile with the stout riding whip he carried in his hand.

"Well, where is she?" he growled, as the man hurried back.

"She is there, captain, 'dead.'"

"Ah!"

Zanchez turned his horse, and, with a sour smile, cantered towards the hut where Grace Stanton had been imprisoned. He sprang from the saddle, and entered the shed. The morning sunlight shot athwart the gloom a beam of light, which rested upon the still form of Grace Stanton, stretched upon the ground.

Her face, a little drawn with pain, had the shadow of a dawning smile hovering upon it—a smile of

soft contentment, as though she greeted a friend who held out arms of welcome.

Spercias Zanchez stood by her and gazed down upon the woman he had sworn he loved; the woman he had murdered; and a buzz came from the doorway, where the troopers had gathered—a murmuring buzz, subdued by superstitious terror, for to each man came the remembrance of Zanchez' gift to her on the night before.

The captain stooped down by her side, and lifted the tumbled hair from about her shoulders; and then with an imprecation he started to his feet.

"Where's the man who guarded this place?" he shouted, with another oath.

A trooper stepped from the group, and faced him.

"Here, captain."

"You were on guard here?"

"Yes, captain."

"Who entered?"

"No one, my captain."

"Liar! You slept."

"Indeed, no, my captain."

"You slept, I say, you slept Liar! liar! liar!" and at each word he struck the man with his whip.

"I do not lie, captain," the man cried wildly, retreating from him, and shielding his face with his arms. "I kept guard, and no one entered, and no one left. I swear it."

"Then you are a thief," he cried, seizing the man by the throat, and shaking him to and fro. "Where is the jewel? Answer me that; answer me, or I'll have you shot."

"I do not know, captain. I have not seen it, I dare not touch it."

"Search," Zanchez shrieked to the crowd around the doorway.

"Search. We leave in five minutes, with or without it; and you, too, search, you cur. If you don't find it——" He shrugged his shoulders.

With feverish haste—the life of a comrade depended upon it—the men searched high and low in and

about the hut for the stone that had disappeared; and while they did so Zanchez paced amongst them, pouring forth volleys of Spanish oaths, cursing Dick Stanton, and blaspheming at the dead. The minutes passed, and the search was futile.

"Sound the 'fall in,'" Zanchez exclaimed with icy coldness.

"Well," he shrieked, to several who still stood looking towards him; "well, why do you wait? Have you found it?"

"No, my captain."

"Stand him there," he cried, pointing to a tree.

The men stood motionless, and Zanchez swung himself into his saddle, and sat there trembling with rage.

"You can go too far, you bully," Ralph cried. "Your own men will not murder a comrade."

There was an approving murmur from the troopers—an ominous murmur that told of a spreading rebellion. It wanted but one man to fire the train, and it would be Spercía Zanchez who died there and not the trooper.

He took a revolver from the holster, and carefully examined it; and then with his left hand resting upon the back of his saddle, the right holding the pistol, he spoke again.

"See that you do not go too far yourself, boy," he exclaimed, turning to Ralph with a contemptuous smile. "My men know me, and know what to expect if they play me false. This cur has stolen my jewel and lied to me."

"It is not so, my captain, I swear——"

"Or he has slept upon his guard, and others have stolen it. There is but one punishment for treachery—death. And death it shall be, even if I must be the one to deal it forth," he continued, a spasm of rage taking the place of his former coldness. "Let the man stand forth who wishes to defend the traitor."

His eyes glittered as he gazed down the lines and defiantly scanned the face of every man. No one moved from the lines, no one came forward to confront him.

"You see, I know my men," he sneered, turning to Ralph; and then he addressed the troopers again, speaking with a ferocious scowl that dared them to say a word in reply.

"A man who sleeps upon his guard is a traitor to all his comrades, a danger to the cause he should defend. I have tried this man and condemned him. His sentence is death."

In the twinkling of an eye he raised his revolver. There was a sharp report, and the man, without a cry, fell prone upon his face.

"Forward!"

Spercía Zanchez viciously dug his spurs into the sides of his horse, and bounded to the front of his troops.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIGHT IN THE HILLS

"It's going to be a bad day with Zanchez," a man next to Ralph remarked, as they rode on.

"*Dios!*" another growled, as he fingered his rifle, "one of these times his bad day will be his last."

During the night a few straggling parties of skirmishers had joined the main body, and it was now a troop of about one hundred and sixty strong that moved towards Reos, the capital of Santa Teresa.

Several of those around grunted approval of the sentiments of their comrade, and muttered what might have been either a prayer or a curse beneath their breath.

Ralph glanced sharply from one to another, and the thought grew in his mind how ready they all were to rise against the man who ruled them—ruled them with a rod of iron. Why should he not fan the smouldering embers into flame, and so gain his escape?

Revolt, revenge and insurrection were smouldering in the breast of every man whom Zanchez treated worse than a snarling dog. The fear of him kept it down, but it was there, and only needed a leader strong enough to make the first movement, and then the bullying Spaniard would meet the fate that he so richly deserved.

One hundred and sixty men who hated him; and he rode at the head, with his back towards them. It was that brutish indifference to fear that had saved his life time after time.

The man of Ralph's thoughts halted, turned his horse, and rode slowly up and down the lines, narrowly scanning the bronzed faces of the troopers, as though he scented danger, and strove to find its whereabouts.

The eyes of each conspirator sought some other resting-place, and he passed back to the front of the troop.

"You're mighty good at talking, but daren't raise a finger when he's near," Harrington sneered to the man who guarded him.

"It is the evil eye, señor. He bewitches us."

"Evil fiddlesticks! He's only a little bigger scoundrel than any of you. That's all. Lend me your gun, and I'll drop him where he stands."

The man shook his head emphatically, and Ralph, feeling a slight touch upon his knee, looked down. The rear of the troop was now just on the outskirts of the village of Cufus, and one of its peasants, a man who had shown disgusting servility to Zanchez, stood, holding up a can of caña.

"Before you go, señor," he exclaimed, "'tis a thirsty road"; and then, as Ralph bent to take the spirit from him, he swiftly whispered, "Two leagues further on, the road goes through a cañon. Hold yourself ready for a rescue. Buena fortuna, señor."

Ralph drained the can, to hide

the flush of elation in his face. Then all was not over yet. The insurgents were still active, and but a few hours might see the position of affairs reversed once more.

He returned the can to the peasant; and, four deep, the morning sun flashing on the barrels of their guns, the last of the troop passed out of the village into the broad, open plain.

On the other side of the purple range of mountains ahead lay Reos, and the road already commenced to gradually ascend. Miles away he could see it winding over one of the lower spurs, and there was an exhilarating fascination in the thought that somewhere amongst those towering summits lurked a hundred rifles that would spring to fiery life for the sake of him and his comrade.

On they rode, on, on; and now the spot was only a short mile ahead. He could see how the road wound and twisted through frowning walls of overhanging rock, and then reappeared, white and dazzling in the sunlight, higher up the crest of the hill.

It was a position from which a hundred men could slay an army, and, all unsuspecting, they rode towards it.

But were they all unsuspecting?

The forepart of the troop, under Zanchez' orders, had halted, and the others came gradually to a standstill.

Zanchez was slowly riding down the lines, and half a dozen of the soldiers were cantering ahead into the gorge.

If the rescuers were not well under cover, the whole attempt was doomed to failure; and Ralph strained his ears for the shot that should tell of the discovery of the ambushade.

It was the captain's voice that roughly brought his thoughts back again.

"Remove the prisoners right to the rear, and lash their hands behind them."

The two Englishmen struggled fiercely as this new indignity was forced upon them ; but resistance was absurd and useless.

"What is the good, señor ?" the man exclaimed, as he fastened the thongs. "It is but two against a hundred."

"It's a degradation."

"Captured rebels must not complain. The captain feels uncertain as to whether your friends may not be rash enough to attempt a rescue in the cañon, and he takes precautions."

The reconnoitring party cantered back. There was a brief consultation, and Zanchez resumed his position at the head of the troops. Ralph and Stephen were taken to the rear, and they all moved forwards towards the gorge.

Into the shadow of the rocks passed the head of the column, each man now with his rifle ready, glancing narrowly to the right and left.

Even from where he was in the rear Ralph could see Zanchez riding in the very front up the now rapidly-rising roadway. His heart throbbed with excitement until it became almost pain. His nerves tingled, and the blood surged through his brain as he waited for the ring of the first shot.

Then came a cold rush of chilling disappointment. Suppose he had been misled ? Suppose it was all a mistake, or perhaps but a trick to fool the Englishmen ?

The column was gradually creeping along the defile ; in ten minutes Zanchez would be clear of the cañon and out in the sunlight again.

If they were there, why did they delay ?

"With all his fiendish ways, he has got some pluck," Harrington ejaculated, for they were watching the captain riding well ahead, his rifle in his hands, his head turned automatically from side to side as he scanned the rocks above them.

Suddenly as they watched they saw him bring his rifle to his

shoulder, and fire at a jutting ledge upon his right.

Crack !

The first shot came as a snap upon the air, and ere its echo died away a blinding, withering storm was the reply.

From every rock in the defile there sprang a rifle, and every rifle hissed and spluttered flame. Crack ! Crack ! Crack ! reverberated through the cañon until its very walls seemed alive with rings of curling smoke and steel-blue barrels, and the ground a disorderly mass of rearing, plunging horses and furious, cursing men.

They answered volley with volley, but their shots pinged harmlessly against the granite or ricocheted back upon them.

A dozen men, maddened and shrieking with rage, dropped from their horses and made a rush to scale the sides of the cañon, only to fall back riddled with bullets before they gained a foothold on the rocks.

Retreat, instant retreat, was the only course. The place was a death trap.

A white rag upon a pole fluttered from behind a crag, and the firing died away ; the grumbling echoes faded, and all was silence, save for the groans of the dying and the shrieks of a horse that lay with a broken foreleg, and lashed at the ground in its agony.

A man sprang upon a rock beside the flag of truce.

"Leave the prisoners, señor, and you may go free——" He said no more, for in that second Zanchez tore a revolver from his belt and shot him where he stood. Then the confusion became riot and disorder—the retreat a wild, irresponsible stampede.

Each now fought and struggled with those nearest to be the first to escape from that death valley, while from the unseen marksmen overhead still showered the rattling hail of bullets down upon them.

Three score men out of the hun-

dred and sixty gained the plain that they had left so lately. Three score men, torn, begrimed, and wounded, for nearly every one was bleeding from some injury which had not sufficed to stretch him by the side of his companions.

And in the post of honour in retreat came Spencia Zanchez. As he was the first to enter, so he was the last to leave the cañon. It was a fierce, brutal, apathetic courage that commanded admiration, even though one must hate its possessor.

As he reached the open he turned and ironically waved his hat to the enemy, and then cantered after the straggling remnant of his defeated army.

"There is no fear of pursuit as yet," he said. "It will take them hours to reach the road from their position. Back to Cufus. Forward!"

The scattered troopers dejectedly obeyed him, and rode slowly back to the village with the two prisoners in their midst.

"An attempt at rescue that failed miserably," Zanchez jeered, coming to the side of Stephen Harrington.

"Ah! they'll try again," he answered. "They're led by Englishmen and not by bastard Spaniards."

With a cry of fury Zanchez caught at Stephen's throat, and with his clenched fist struck him full upon the mouth.

"You dog," he shrieked. "I'll have you strung upon the next tree and left to rot. Curse you!"

A thin red streak was trickling down the Englishman's chin, and he was tearing fiercely at the thongs that bound him. His face was flushed and distorted with a look of hatred as deadly as that on the Spaniard's.

"I'll kill you for that," he hissed between his teeth; and so they entered the village that they had left only a few hours before.

All day long, under the tropical sun, the two Englishmen had eyes

only for that long white roadway stretching to the distant mountains; momentarily expecting to see the dust clouds arise, heralding the approach of the insurgents to finish the work of annihilation that they had commenced, and effect a rescue. But evening came, and nothing had happened.

They saw the guards placed by Zanchez in the most favourable positions completely surrounding the village. They heard him say that for himself the whole night would be spent in visiting each sentinel by turn; and then unceremoniously they were cast into an outhouse, their hands still bound behind them, without food or water.

Through the cracks in the weather-beaten roof they saw the sky turn indigo, and the silvery stars come forth, and wondered if it was for the last time.

The free and easy manner of their gaolers towards them had disappeared. It was no longer "*Buenos noches, señores*," but a curse that they addressed them with; for was it not through them that a hundred of their comrades were left dead or dying in the cañon, while the condition of those who had survived was too desperate to be comfortable?

The rebels would surely make a descent upon Cufus by and by, and, judging their strength from the firing in the cañon it would mean extermination.

"Poor old Grace!" Ralph murmured as the door was barred upon them. "This is where she was last night. I wonder if that fellow saved the kid as he promised!"

"What I want to know," Stephen retorted viciously, "is why our friends have sat twiddling their thumbs all day long when they could have taken this God-forsaken hole half a dozen times over."

"Caution."

"Tush! They would have been certain of victory."

"Maybe," Ralph replied quietly, "but they are wise enough to recognize that the first act of Zanchez, if he saw defeat inevitable, would be to revenge himself upon his prisoners. I suppose you're not anxious to be shot, Stephen?"

"No," he answered, his face becoming a shade paler. "I didn't think of that. Then we should have been better off without their interference," he continued sullenly. "We should have been taken to Reos, where things are civilized, and, after a spell of prison, expelled the country; while, as it is, owing to this affair to-day——"

"We shall probably both be shot, or, if you show the white feather, hanged."

"Nice sort of rescuers to be contented with killing a few troopers."

"Yes, rescuing is thankless work," Ralph responded drily, and then he suddenly jumped from the heap of straw upon which he had been lying.

"It's been a long job, but it's done at last," he exclaimed triumphantly, showing his freed hands, the wrists scored with the red marks of the thongs. "Turn over, and I'll have you settled in a minute."

"The reason they didn't make a move," he continued, tugging away at Stephen's bonds, "is that they expect us to escape and join them; and we'll do it."

"Look what a tumble-down shanty this is. Buck up, man, and we'll be outside in an hour. Take that iron peg there, and dig away at the ground by the further wall."

Stirred to action by the energy of his friend, Stephen Harrington took the peg in his hand, and the two men knelt side by side and started digging at the soft earth.

A stifled exclamation from Ralph caused Stephen to glance up.

"What's the matter?"

"Look, I have found it buried in the earth, Spercia Zanchez' jewel! Grace Stanton knew that

it had caused her death, and hid it here."

CHAPTER V

TO BE SHOT AT DAWN

SWIFTLY and silently the two men returned to their task, their hearts buoyed up with the hope of escape—the fascination upon them that, although neither believed it, still there might be something in the lucky-stone. They possessed it now; and, if it remained true to its legend, it should bring good fortune to them, and disaster to all who tried to oppose them.

Energetically as they both worked now, the task was long and wearisome, for it was one that had to be pursued with the greatest caution, lest a sound audible without should arouse attention and frustrate their attempt. Gradually they deepened the hole, scooping out the sandy soil with their hands, and throwing it loosely upon the floor of the hut, so that no pile of earth should be seen in the event of a surprise visit; and then, at last, a breath of cool, fresh air puffed into their faces.

"Through!" Ralph exclaimed, with elation, turning excitedly to Harrington.

"Good luck!" he responded; and the two men sat back and rested for a while, before making their final attack.

It seemed truly as if luck had favoured them, for as they sat there waiting, the sentry was challenged in a whisper that would not have been audible to them if they had been working, and swiftly they flung a bundle of straw against the hole, and, throwing themselves down upon the ground, feigned to sleep.

The whispering still continued without, and they could now distinguish the harsh tones of Zanchez, thick with many cups of caña.

"The beast knew that our first action would be to break out, and he

thought to catch us in the act," Stephen whispered.

"What's he doing?"

"Watching through a crack in the door, I expect."

Their whisperings were broken by the sound of the unbarring of the door, and through the corners of their eyes they watched the captain as he strode into the hut, and, holding a torch high above his head, narrowly gazed around him. It seemed to those who feigned to sleep that they dwelt long upon the bundle of straw, and finally he moved towards it; but even as he did so a ringing shot sounded comparatively close at hand, and, flinging down the torch, he made for the doorway.

"Where was that shot?" he demanded.

"It sounded from the northwest, captain."

"Then the cursed rebels are on the move again. Stamp out that torch, and bar the door again, and don't move until you get orders from me."

The man saluted, and Spertia Zanchez strode away.

"More luck, Stephen," Ralph exclaimed, raising himself on his elbow as the man departed.

"Ah! My heart stood still as he walked towards the hole."

Falling to work again directly Zanchez had departed, swiftly they widened the opening, and now could smell the sweet morning air; as it came to them from across the plains. It was fragrance itself, after the stifling atmosphere of the shed, rendered even worse by the smoke of the smouldering torch, and they sniffed it with delight. It was a breath of freedom from the outer world; their nerves tightened, and their hearts beat high with hope.

Zanchez was far away, and no sound of life came to them.

The opening was now wide enough for a man to cautiously wriggle through.

"Go first," Ralph exclaimed;

and Harrington crept through and listened.

"Is it all safe?"

"No; be quiet, I can hear the tramp of horses."

Faintly there broke upon their ears the beat of horse's hoofs approaching. Faint, very faint, but steadily growing nearer.

"It's only one man," Ralph whispered. "Keep still, I'm coming out."

"Wait," was the reply. "Let us see what happens. I may have to crawl back."

The challenging voice of a sentinel came clearly towards them, the Spanish passwords were exchanged, and then another voice interrupted.

"Well, what in heaven's name is the matter?" Spertia Zanchez shouted. "Why have you deserted your post?"

"To bring the news that the rebels are moving down upon you, captain."

"How many?"

"I caught sight of the first skirmishing party, captain, and, firing at them to arouse your attention here, rode back at once. It is a surprise to rescue the English captives."

"Dios, I'll cheat them yet. Call out a firing party. In a few minutes it will be light, and they'll find them dead."

"Yes, captain," the man answered, and rode away.

The prisoners saw the tiny flame as Zanchez struck a match and lighted his cigar, and then watched the spark growing larger as he walked within a few yards of them and proceeded to the door of the hut.

"You need not unbar the door," he exclaimed to the man on guard. "I'm not going in, I'll sit here."

Shivering with apprehension, Stephen Harrington crept closer to the hole, and whispered, "Have you heard all?"

"Yes, it looks bad for us."

"But he won't dare to," Stephen

exclaimed again, his voice trembling as he spoke; "he won't dare to shoot us."

"I don't know. Zanchez is not troubled with any false sentiment."

"Well, then, crawl out, and let us both make a dash for it while there's time."

"It is impossible for both to escape; at any moment Zanchez may enter, and if both had disappeared we should be chased and caught before we'd cleared the village. One must stop, and the other go."

"One must stop?" Harrington exclaimed.

"Yes; if one goes the other can gain time and give him a chance of a few extra moments; and that, with luck, will mean freedom."

"But who goes, and who stays?"

"You go, and I stay; for you were out first, and it's your chance. I'll stay and keep them off."

"But they'll shoot you."

"I expect they will; but it isn't worth while that two should be shot, if one will do."

"That's right enough," Stephen murmured complaisantly.

"There is one thing I should like to escape for, and that's my promise to Grace Stanton. I said I'd look after the youngster, Steve."

"Yes," his companion responded, glancing round uneasily, and his whole manner showing his longing to say good-bye and clear away.

"I would like to live because of that promise—to find the kid, and look after her."

"I expect she's all right—sure to be," Harrington answered hurriedly.

For a moment Ralph did not speak. His thoughts travelled with a flash over the events of the past few days, which had all fitted in together, and led him now to the position that he must give his life for his trust. It was not so many hours back that he accepted that trust, and yet it seemed that then he was but a boy; while now he was a man, filled with good purpose, and yet doomed to die.

He determined that he would give his life for his trust, for that was the only way in which he could keep his promise; and as he did so it seemed that something new was born in his heart, that the face of Grace Stanton shone forth in the darkness of that grimy hut, and with a sweet smile repaid him for his sacrifice.

"I expect the kid's all right," Harrington muttered again, fuming at the delay.

"Zanchez threw the youngster into a clump of bushes by the side of the road," Ralph said, "and when we met those Englishmen I got one of them to promise to go back, find the child, and look after her until we came to claim her."

"Then, of course, she's all right," Stephen emphatically responded, "so what's the use of troubling any more?"

"It's this, Steve; you are going to clear away in a moment, and I'll guard your departure, and by hook or crook gain half an hour for you, and for that I shall pay my life."

"No, you won't, Ralph. Directly I leave here I shall make a dash for our friends, explain things to them, and in under an hour the village will be ringing with the shots of a surprise party. A few minutes after you and I will be charging at the head of our victorious army, and chasing that pig Zanchez and his followers like chaff before the wind."

"No, that won't do, Steve. That isn't why I'm staying behind. I want you to promise when you leave here that you will not take the road to the north, but retrace your steps to where the child is, and, rescuing her, leave all fighting behind you, and making your way stealthily towards the coast, return to England, and devote your life in guarding and caring for her—taking from me the trust that I gave my life to fulfil."

Stephen Harrington growled something under his breath.

"Those are the terms, Stephen,

upon which I will guard your safety with my life. Do you accept ? ”

“ What’s the good of taking such a down-in-the-mouth view of the thing ? ” Harrington answered viciously. “ Of course it’s your affair, and not mine : and if you ask it, naturally I’ll do it. But, man alive, isn’t it worth having a fight for your money ? If you can keep them off for half an hour, surely it’s better that I should use that time in bringing our people up to rescue you ; and, that over, why, we can ride to the ranch together, and get out of the country at once.”

Ralph Chesleigh felt his blood stir a little, and the longing to die fighting came over him. It was surely better to make one last attempt than die in this hopeless way ; but in a second he slowly shook his head.

“ No good, Steve, my lad ; see here, I’m going to give up my life for the kid, because I promised to care for her. If we get into another fight, things might not go well, and she’d be left without anyone to guard her. If you brought a rescue party here, and I had been shot before you returned, while you were killed in the fight, she’d be left friendless ; and that is not my plan.”

“ But to be shot like a dog——”

“ I know, Steve, my lad ; it takes the heart out of a man, but it’s the only way. Leave the fighting alone, old chap, and get out of Santa Teresa.”

“ All right, then. It’s your affair.”

“ It’s my affair, and yours, Steve,” Ralph whispered solemnly. “ Give me your hand. Swear by all you hold sacred in this world. Swear that, as there’s a God above us, you will fly by the southern road, and find Phyllis.”

“ I swear it.”

“ Swear you will take her to England, and guard and protect her as you would your own child, your own life.”

“ I swear it.”

“ Good-bye, Steve.”

“ Good-bye, old chap.”

“ I say, Steve. Just a second. Presently, when the kid can understand, you know, I think I’d like her to hear just a little about this. Not enough to make her unhappy, but so that she’ll give a thought to me. When they stand me up to be shot presently, I shall think that one of these days her eyes will get a little soft in hearing about it. It’ll help me a bit. Good-bye, Steve.”

“ Good-bye, Ralph.”

The two men clasped hands again. Stephen Harrington melted into the shadows, and Ralph covered the hole with loose straw, and waited.

CHAPTER VI

UNTIL TO-MORROW

HE did not feel heroic as he flung himself down again and waited.

He was young and strong, and living the last hour of his life. He wished it could be otherwise, but he had kept his oath.

Stephen by now must be clear of the village, he would be able to lie low at the ranch, until all the trouble was over, and then he and the child could return to England.

Then there was the Golden River. He had forgotten to tell Harrington about that paper, but of course he would discover it. The child would grow up rich and beautiful, and Stephen would be her guardian. Ah, well ! that was all right, but he wished they could have got off together.

The unbarring of the door brought him back to the stern realities of the position. It was his cue to play a part, and he, at all costs, must gain delay for Stephen’s sake.

Spercia Zanchez strode into the hut, followed by half a dozen of his men.

“ Well, what is it ? ” Ralph growled sleepily, raising himself upon his elbow.

"Your pardon, señores," Zanchez replied, sweeping the ground with his sombrero in an exaggerated, mocking salute, "your pardon, señores, but your unruly followers have forced me to a step that I regret. They have slain more than half of my troop in an attempt to rescue you, which failed; they are active on the outskirts of Cufus, and will, doubtless, make another attack, and, greatly outnumbering us, may succeed. Your pardon, señores." Again he made that mocking bow. "I'm sorry to cause you inconvenience, but I'm going to have you shot."

"It is a poor joke, at an ill-chosen time, señor," Ralph exclaimed, with simulated anger.

"It is no pleasantry, *amigo*; it is truth. I am going to have the pair of you shot—now."

"You have forgotten your position, señor," Ralph continued, speaking with a quiet, stern dignity. "We are Englishmen, and demand a fair trial at Reos."

"Bah!"

"You dare not shoot us in cold blood."

"You are rebels, *amigo*."

"We demand to be taken to Reos."

"You, as prisoners, are a danger and a menace to my remaining troops. It is a measure of precaution that they will applaud at Reos."

"At Reos, yes," Ralph repeated hotly, for now it grew upon him that he was not only fighting for delay, but for his own life. "At Reos, yes; but what of England, Zanchez? Do you think that they will allow you to murder two Englishmen with impunity? They will demand a heavy reckoning from Santa Teresa."

"England is a long way off, *amigo*."

"England's power stretches from pole to pole, and the man who in any country attacks one of her subjects must prepare himself for her vengeance, heavy and implac-

able. So surely as you do this, Zanchez, so surely will you be tried and hanged for our murder."

"You are rebels, the leaders of a conspiracy against the Government of Santa Teresa. I will take the risk."

"As you will, then, I shall be ready."

"And your companion?"

"I will awaken him in time. I suppose even a half-bred Spaniard will grant men a few moments to prepare for death!"

"*Dios*, boy, keep that wagging tongue of yours quieter, or death may not be so peaceful as you seem to think."

He came over and caught Ralph by the shoulder.

"We half-bred Spaniards have half-bred means of stopping the babbling of fools," he snarled fiercely. "Another such word, and I'll have you stripped and flogged to death, instead of shot. I'll have you tied up by the thumbs, and left as carrion for the vultures."

And he waited, hoping, perhaps, that Ralph would provoke him further; but the Englishman answered nothing.

"*Caramba!*" cried Zanchez, after a second's pause, "let it pass; you're only a boy, and have not learned the wisdom of silence."

He abruptly ordered the troopers to go, and walked towards the door.

"Half an hour for devotions, señor," he exclaimed with a laugh, "and then we'll see if England can hear the rattle of a firing party, and the dying gasp of traitors. Until then, señor," he bowed once more, and stood for an instant in the doorway. And then a thought seemed to strike him, and he strode back towards Ralph, who had flung himself down upon the straw again.

"Your comrade sleeps soundly, *amigo*," he said, with a chuckle. "It's a pity, when, in a few minutes he will sleep so long. Waken him, and let him know he is wasting his last few moments."

"Let him sleep while he can," Ralph replied, throwing his arm across the rolled-up rug.

"No, arouse him, and let me see his face when he learns his fate. He's not one of your sort, boy," Zanchez continued, with grim appreciation. "He's a traitor, a coward, a rat who'd sell his best friend to save his miserable skin. If you were both going to live I would say——" He broke off suddenly, and, with a dawning suspicion in his eyes, came nearer and kicked the rug.

The straw rustled beneath it, and with another kick he scattered it, and exposed the hole through which Stephen had escaped.

The cool morning air came with a gust into the hut, and Zanchez stood there looking into the face of Ralph, who had risen to his feet.

"Why," he demanded, "did you let him clear off, and attempt to gain time for him?"

"He was out first, and it was useless for both to attempt to escape."

"*Dios!*" the Spaniard exclaimed, his eyebrows raising themselves in bushy arcs upon his bronzed forehead, "and yet you are only a boy. Which way has he gone?"

"Which way should he go, but towards our friends?"

"Ah! northwards, towards the hills. Well, he can wait a while."

The captain walked to the rough bench, and seated himself upon it. He took a cigar from his pocket, lighted it, and flung another to his prisoner.

"You are a rebel, boy, and fight against the Government."

"That is known to every one. What then?"

Zanchez smoked silently, and then suddenly crashed down his fist with a mighty oath.

"This—this—boy. With one of your spirit to join me, I too am a rebel. With one of your pluck and grit to fight by my side, I'll turn the whole army against the

President. I'll reduce Reos to ashes in a week. I, Spercia Zanchez, will be President of Santa Teresa, and you whatsoever you choose to be. Now you are a prisoner, condemned to death; a moment hence, if you do so decide, you are my comrade, my chief lieutenant. In a month I am President, and you what you will."

There was a gleam of ambition in the man's eyes as he poured forth his proposal, a gleam that told of long-cherished desires now, as he thought, near to ripening.

"What do you say, boy? You are a rebel, and I will join you. These followers of yours we will pull this way and that just as we choose, until our purpose is accomplished. Our own Government troops we will turn to fight against the Government, and you and I will win together. Is it not so? You're only a boy, but you've more pluck than a battalion of the sort I'm used to. What do you say?"

In an ecstasy of exultation the man sprang up, and clapped Ralph upon the shoulder.

"What do you say, boy, eh?" he repeated, "what do you say?"

"I say no."

"Think what it means—you are really winning me to your side, and I am bringing my troops with me."

"Ah! that is one way to look at it. There is another; and it seems to me, if I accepted your offer I should be using my friends, who fight only for the right, to do the dirty work of a scamp."

"You refuse, eh?"

"Yes; I refuse to join with a cold-blooded murderer of women and children. I refuse to sell my friends into your hands. Call out your firing party, scour the country for your escaped prisoner, and shoot me if you like. I refuse absolutely."

With a muttered curse, Zanchez drew a whistle from his pocket and blew it sharply, once and then again, and two of his troopers entered, and stood at attention.

"One of the English dogs has escaped, Tasso," he exclaimed, addressing the foremost man, "and made for the insurgents' camp amongst the hills to the northward. Take a score of men, and search the road between here and there. Ride like the wind, and don't return without him. You understand?"

"Yes, my captain."

"Right. Go!"

The men saluted, and sharply turning, left; and a few moments later the clatter of hoofs through the village told of the departure of the troopers in chase of Harrington.

"Search the road between here and the insurgents' camp," had been Zanchez' order, and Ralph could scarcely repress a smile as he thought how easily the astute captain had been befooled.

It was, of course, only natural that he should believe that the escaped rebel had made to rejoin his friends in the north; and yet even now Stephen must be a league away upon the southern road, every step taking him nearer to Phyllis and to freedom.

"You are determined to be a fool, boy?" Zanchez asked, looking towards him again.

"I am determined not to join with you."

"As you will. Juan!"

"Yes, my captain."

"Take this fellow out, bind him to the nearest tree, and shoot him."

"Yes, my captain?"

"Adios, amigo," Zanchez exclaimed, with another ironical bow.

"Hasta manana," Ralph responded, laughing carelessly.

"There will be no to-morrow for you, boy."

"Who can say, Zanchez? It is you who have said farewell, not I. You have lost your talisman of luck, your Jewel of Death. You have said good-bye, not I. Who can say but what it will be you, and not I, who will be dead to-morrow?"

The Englishman felt that he talked but idly—that he only played upon the superstitious fears of the Spaniard; but it was some cold consolation to know that he had awakened a lurking fear in the heart of the scoundrel who had condemned him.

There was some little feeling of elation in the knowledge that the sinewy Hercules would have given anything to recall that word, so dreaded by all his race, "good-bye."

Hasta manana, until to-morrow, until next week, until next year; but never good-bye, lest it may mean the long good-bye of death to him who says it.

"We shall see, amigo," the Spaniard replied sourly. "Lead him out, tie him to a tree, and shoot him."

"Yes, my captain."

The trooper passed out, and Ralph followed him into the open, with Spercia Zanchez close behind them.

The morning had broken fair and smiling, the dawn suffused the greenish grey of the sky with rosy light; and as he gazed, the blushing clouds changed to crimson, then to gold, the sun burst forth in splendour, and Santa Teresa woke to life again.

Then, with the flood of day, came the enthusiasm of youth.

Behind him was the gloom and suffocating atmosphere of the shed where he had been imprisoned. Before him—what? Death! Yes, but with the strength of a martyr to support him. He was young, and life is ever precious to the youthful, and he was to die; but he had kept his word, and, proudest thought to every Englishman, he had done his duty.

He had promised Grace Stanton to guard the child with his life, and he was giving his life for his trust; while somewhere down that road that dazzled in the morning sunlight, Stephen Harrington was speeding to fulfil his oath.

"You need not bind me, Zanchez. Let me die as a man, and not as a dog."

"Accept my terms, you young fool."

"No, I tell you, no. I would sooner die now than save my life by moving a finger to help you. I would sooner anything than take life as a gift from you, a low-bred South American thief, who has become a great soldier by murdering women and children—a cut-throat brigand, whose only safety is to hide in a corrupt Republic. Now, shoot me—shoot me!"

Zanchez raised his clenched fist in a passion, and then dropped it again.

"Stand him there," he foamed; "call out a firing party. No, stop! Get a rope, and hang the dog! *Dios!* we'll hang them both together. Here's the other!"

"Here's the other!" Ralph's eyes turned from the road to the south, and followed the wild gesticulations of the Spaniard. He looked towards the hills, and his heart turned to water.

There, along the dusty way, came the troopers he had thought to mislead; and in their midst was the man he had called his friend—the man who had sworn to go south, to the ranch, and care for the youngster, now caught in his own selfish flight in the opposite direction.

Stephen Harrington, the traitor, the liar—Stephen Harrington, the coward!

CHAPTER VII

A LAST CIGAR

THE troopers clattered into the village again, and, dust-covered and triumphant, drew rein, their captive in their midst, in front of Zanchez, who, his sombrero tilted back on his head, a cigar between his teeth, waited, slashing, as usual, his heavy riding-whip against his boot.

A picture for an artist, a commentary on human nature's frailty, a study in expression.

Zanchez scowling with savage rage, and yet, as though seen through a filmy veil—something of a better nature showing through his passion, something of a genuine admiration for the rugged pluck of the man who had given up his life for his friend.

And that friend—Stephen Harrington—white and trembling, a captive caught in an ignoble flight, false to his oath, false to his friend, false to the fatherless child away there on the ranch, and, God grant, better cared for by strangers than by him who had sworn to succour her.

Ralph Chesleigh, condemned to death, and yet fearing it not, conscious that he had done his best in a hopeless cause, and ready to meet his fate like an Englishman; the only bitterness in his cup being, not death itself, but that that death was for nought. That his self-sacrifice—he did not call it that only his duty—that his duty undertaken for Grace Stanton's sake had ended thus.

And round about, a background to the picture, framed in the golden glory of the brilliant morning, the men commanded by Zanchez, the rough, devil-may-care—here to-day and, if the fates decreed, gone to-morrow—soldiers of Santa Teresa.

Zanchez lighted a fresh cigar from the stump of the last, and strode to Stephen's side.

"I'm going to have you hanged," he said, and insultingly blew a thick cloud of smoke into the captive's face.

"For God's sake——" began Stephen, white to the lips and trembling in every limb.

"Have you hanged," repeated Zanchez; "a dog's death; but your friend's worth a soldier's end, and I'll shoot him."

Then suddenly Ralph burst through the men around him, and sprang at Stephen's throat.

"You mean-spirited, lying, cowardly hound," he cried, as he shook him to and fro. "You wretched, lying villain! Was it for your sake that I gave up my life and my hopes? Was it that you might turn tail like the cur you are, and try to save only your own skin? What was the bargain, you traitor?" He struck him across the face with his clenched fist; and a thin trickle of red came from the corner of Stephen's twitching mouth, making the ghastly pallor of his face more ghastly still.

For a moment Zanchez gazed at the two in silence, and did not interfere. A struggle was going on in the man's mind; the desire to let this plucky boy live, even though he had flouted him to his face, scorned his offer, and cursed at his scheming after power. But power dominated Zanchez's whole being, and so he hardened his heart. He could not risk the danger to himself of letting this man live. There was no other way, and he signalled for the firing party.

Yet even as the men examined the locks of their rifles and slipped in fresh cartridges he thrust his hand into his coat pocket and offered Ralph a cigar. The prisoner took it, bit off the end, and accepted the proffered light. He gripped the cigar between his teeth, and drew at it with evident satisfaction. The blue smoke curled upward in the bright morning sunlight, and even in the last few seconds of his life Ralph Chesleigh enjoyed his smoke, and felt some faint show of gratitude to the burly ruffian who had yielded him this pleasure. He walked to the tree, turned and leant his back against it, and folded his arms. From his heart a prayer went up to Heaven that his sins might be forgiven. He confessed that he had nought to set against a black record, beyond perhaps that under all circumstances he had striven to do his duty; and so, with the high smile of an

Englishman upon his face, the cigar between his lips, he awaited the word to fire.

Stephen had been led to his side by the troopers, who had thrown a dangling rope with an ugly noose over a sturdy branch. He stood there shivering, a prey to mortal terror, in absolute collapse and dread of death. And so they waited, and as yet Zanchez did not give the order. Perhaps he wanted that man for whom, although he meant to shoot him, he had a sneaking admiration to finish his last cigar in peace.

"Can't we do anything?" gasped Harrington, glancing at the upright and unmoved figure of his companion. "It's terrible to die, Ralph. Can't we do anything?"

"Yes," hissed Ralph, "behave like men. Show we're Englishmen, face death when it's inevitable, and never let these Spanish blackguards say we showed the white feather. You've been an infernal scoundrel, Harrington; but I'd forgive you all if you'd only brace up and show them we come of the same race, that the blood of England flows in our veins alike. Buck up, man; that's what we can do, that and only that."

But his words fell upon deaf ears. It was as though he spoke to stone itself. A paralysis of terror had set its icy hand on Stephen Harrington, and he shivered as though the soft southern wind that fanned their foreheads was a chilling north-east gale. With a contempt and loathing, such as one has for some creeping reptile, Ralph gazed upon this moral and physical wreck, in whom it was impossible to awaken a spark of pluck or manhood; and then he turned upon him and poured forth a torrent of scorn and indignation.

"You despicable coward!" he cried. "You liar! Had you shown one ounce of spirit I would have forgiven you. I would not have embittered your last moments by what I'm going to tell you now."

He took his cigar from his mouth, flicked off the ash, and still Harrington paid no heed to his words; he was sunk deep in the lethargy of despair, from which it seemed nothing could arouse him.

"I'm going to tell you this," said Ralph, with a lurking triumph in his tone, "that you've brought this upon yourself; that had you kept your word to me about the child you would be free now."

"It's a lie," yelled Harrington. "It's an infernal lie. You promised to keep them off until I got clear away; and I'd not had ten minutes' start before they were after me—curse you. You betrayed me to them. They were after me at once."

"Which way?" asked Ralph calmly.

"Every way. They scoured the country."

"No, Stephen, only one way. Northward."

"You sent them."

"Yes, I sent them northward. You had sworn by all you held most dear to go southward to the ranch for the child."

"Curse the little brat! If it hadn't been for her we shouldn't be here now."

"You swore to go to the south."

"And I went to the north. What then?"

"What then? Pursuit and capture, and now the rope, as you deserve. Zanchez came into the hut and parleyed with me, wanted me to wake you when he saw the bundle of rugs on the ground. I begged for more sleep for you; and then he strode across and kicked the straw and found you had escaped."

"What did he say?"

"Offered me my freedom to join with him."

"And you refused?"

"Yes, with disgust; I told him I did not league myself with half-bred Spanish murderers."

"I wish he'd give me the chance. What did he say when he found I'd escaped?"

"Asked the way you'd gone; and I lied, as I thought, and told him to join our friends in the north, thinking you were safe upon the southern road, towards the ranch and Phyllis. Much good it did to lie for you, Stephen Harrington."

He put his cigar back in his mouth and puffed at it slowly: it was getting very short now, and as it burned so the moments of their lives burned away also, and Zanchez calmly waited.

"Well, I had myself to look after. I know you talked an infernal lot of sentimental rot about that blessed kid, and I wish I'd gone that way; but I didn't, so what's the good of jawing? There's an end of it."

"No, there is not an end of it, Stephen; there's a great deal more than that. You know why they were chasing Dick Stanton so remorselessly."

"He led the insurrection."

"Bah! That's shattered. There was more than that wanted at Reos."

"The Golden River, then."

"Yes, the Golden River; and the location of it is hidden in the child's dress."

A spasm of rage seemed to cut across the face of Stephen Harrington like the lash of a whip.

"What?" he gasped.

"The papers about Stanton's find are on the child. It would have paid you to have kept your oath to me."

"How do you know this?"

"Grace Stanton told me when she gave me the child. You see, it would have paid you, Stephen."

"Curse it all! Why couldn't you tell me that when I got away?"

"You would have gone southward then. Ah, yes, I ought to have done so," Ralph sneered; "it would have saved your life!"

The cigar had burnt down very low, and Zanchez stood waiting; and yet about the stern set jaw of the captain an unusual indecision

seemed to hover and hold him back from shouting the fatal order to his men. It maddened him that Ralph would not sue for mercy, even though his life depended on it; and as he gazed at the courageous face of the man standing there with folded arms, calmly smoking the last half-inch of his cigar, he could not overcome a keen desire to make a final effort to win him over to his side. The brute courage of the man, his phlegmatic indifference to death, had found a responsive thrill in the breast of Spertia Zanchez, strengthened all the more by contrast with the cowering, whimpering coward, Stephen Harrington.

"Once more, *amigo*," said Zanchez, raising his hat as he spoke, "I offer you your freedom on the terms I have named."

"And once more I refuse it."

"Once more I ask you to be as sensible as you are brave—to throw in your lot with mine, and share the good fortune that is bound to come."

"No, Zanchez, no; the only fortune that will come to you is bad fortune. To-day it's your turn—well and good; but *manana* comes, Zanchez, with all things. Make an end of it; you have had my answer."

"*Dios*! how stubborn!" cried the captain, and slashed viciously at his boot.

"Why don't you do what he wants, to save our necks?" wailed Harrington; and then, raising his voice, addressed Zanchez:—

"Captain!"

"Come here," foamed Zanchez, turning fiercely on him. "Come here," he cried again, as one commands a disobedient dog; and Harrington slowly walked towards him, and then, as though in dread of being struck by that slashing whip, threw himself down and grovelled in the dust at his feet.

"Captain," he yelled, in a frenzy of despair, while Ralph gazed on in cold disdain. "Let me live, let

me live; and I will tell you a secret that will make you the richest man in Santa Teresa."

Zanchez looked down upon him in disgust.

"Get up!" he commanded. "Now then, speak! What secret? Out with it!"

"I know that the order from Reos was to take Dick Stanton alive," he said, cringing before the upraised whip of the Spaniard.

"Well, he's dead, as you will be directly. What more?"

"Señor Sesta wanted Stanton's secret, the whereabouts of the Golden River."

"That's gone with him. What more?"

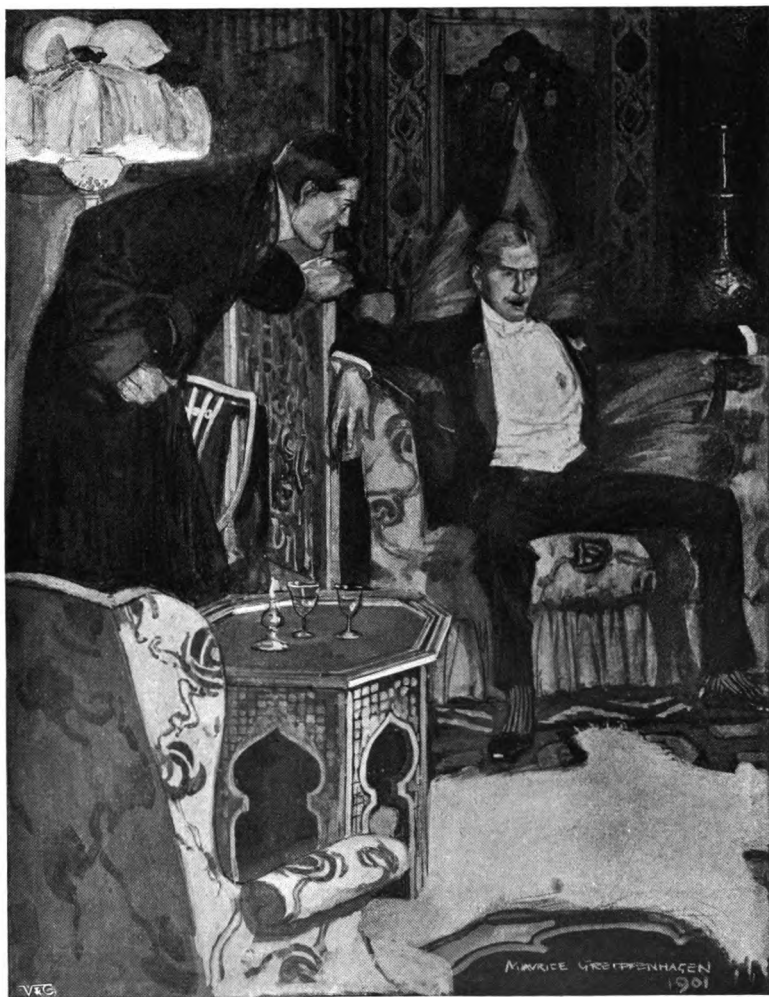
"I know where it is, captain."

"Where what is?"

"The paper, the location."

"It's a lie!" burst in Ralph, speaking for the first time. "Don't believe the cur, Spertia. String him up, and shoot me; and let's have an end of it. Don't believe him: it is only a ruse to cheat you, to gain time in hope of rescue. I've played you fair—I've told you that I'll see you damned before I'll aid you; but this sneaking coward tries to win an hour of life by lies. Here, shoot me—shoot us both—now, at once, and end this farce."

Zanchez stood biting his lips, and no sound broke the silence save the continual thud of his whip against the top of his boot. He was deep in thought. Suppose this quivering coward did know where Dick Stanton's treasure lay, it would be worth sparing his miserable life to learn it. Not for those at Reos. Oh, no; but for himself and his own ends. Wealth! That would go a long way towards giving power; and if he spared Stephen, he could not shoot Ralph, and that, too, pleased him. In his heart of hearts he did not want to shoot him, for who knew but what the turn of circumstances might yet bring him over to his side? Then, too, a phrase of Ralph's sang in his ears about the vengeance of



“ ‘What’s the matter?’ Brand exclaimed.”

The Jewel of Death

[Page 41.]

that England a long way off. He would rather not have to reckon with England.

Stephen Harrington saw his advantage and pressed it home.

"I can prove what I say, captain," he cried. "Let half a dozen men go with me, and I'll show I am no liar. Twenty-four hours will be enough; and, if I've not kept my word by then, it is as easy to shoot me to-morrow as to-day."

"And your comrade?"

"Oh, curse him! Do what you like with him!"

"And yet he gave up his chance of life for you."

"Life's a game of chances," said Stephen, his hopes growing; "it's my chance now, and it's worth your while, Zanchez."

"It's worth my while," muttered Zanchez to himself, "if those cursed rebels don't come down on us again;" and then aloud he answered. "Yes, it's worth my while until to-morrow's dawn."

CHAPTER VIII

AN ENGLISHMAN'S OATH

"Ripp—ripp—ripp—whirr—ripp—ripp!"

There was no mistaking the sound. The Government troops were surprised, and a Maxim gun blazed death upon them from the hill-side.

"Ripp—ripp—whirr—ripp—ripp!"

Like chaff before the wind, the troopers scattered, most of them dropping and lying stiff; a few, with Zanchez at their head, galloping furiously out of that death-dealing hail.

"Curse them!" the captain cried, as he rushed madly away. "Curse them! I wonder if I'm on the wrong side, after all!"

Then, like a whirlwind, the rebels dashed through the valley

in pursuit. Zanchez had assuredly chosen the wrong side—for the moment, at least; with a score of followers he fled, and fleet-footed vengeance was behind him.

He had lost his jewel, and with it his bravado; and he bent low over his horse and shivered as the bullets whizzed by him, as his score dwindled to half a dozen, to four, to three. And then with a shriek he toppled from his saddle, and two sped onwards, chased by a hundred. Assuredly Zanchez was on the wrong side that day. On the wrong side of life, gone to account for years of savage devilry!

The sun rose higher in the valley, and blazed down upon those who lay riddled and torn, and only one man moved. He was the one who had stood by Zanchez pleading for his life for a day, the one who had cast himself down at the first deadly volley—Stephen Harrington. Lying amongst the fallen, he had watched the flight of his captors, the pursuit of his friends, and had kept still as death among the dead. He wanted no more revolutions and petty struggles; there was something better now, the River of Gold. If he made himself known to his friends, he would have to return with them in triumph as a rescued prisoner, and share their ups and downs until the revolution was over, with a chance of being shot in any skirmish—and that was not palatable, as he knew by experience. He smiled as he saw them dash in hot pursuit. He was playing for higher stakes than they, and he had fortune within his grasp.

Millions, millions! He lay with his face buried in the grass, and dreamed it over again. Millions, millions! And all his own!

"Except for Ralph." The thought came to his mind as an icy wind, and he raised himself upon his elbow. Except for Ralph; but he must be dead. Ralph would not have the presence of mind to fall flat upon the ground as he did

when the first shot was fired. Yes, he must be dead.

Stephen raised himself higher upon his hands, and gazed towards the tree where he and his comrade had stood, where the noose still dangled and swayed in the wind; and then he rose to his feet and walked towards it.

A groan stopped him, and he stood looking at one of the troopers who had been badly hit, and still lay writhing in agony.

"Water, *Dios, Dios*," the man moaned.

"And you would have swung me if you'd got a chance, wouldn't you, you dog?" he hissed, bending over him.

"No, señor, water!"

"Don't lie; you'd have hanged me and laughed. Now the tables are turned."

"Water, señor, have mercy!"

"To you who held the rope! What a fool you are. I've discovered a fortune, millions; and I'd rather lose it all than give you so much as would wet your cursed lips. *Adois!*" and he walked towards the tree.

There was a huddled group there, and amongst them, his face strained, and with anguish on every feature, lay Ralph. Guns are no respecters of persons, friends or enemies, and he lay there with a bullet imbedded in him, staring upwards to the sky. There was not a movement as Stephen stood and gazed upon him, and so he turned away; only to return again in a moment, and look down upon him once more.

"I suppose he is dead," he muttered, "But I can't afford to run any risks."

He drew a revolver from the belt of a soldier who lay beside his comrade, and placed it to the ear of the Englishman; and then with a gasp held his hand. A shadow fell upon him as he knelt, the shadow of the trooper whom he had cursed, and the man, with his knife uplifted, lurched towards him.

With the revolver in his hand he turned and shot him dead; and then, flinging down the weapon, he rushed from the valley, ever and anon glancing over his shoulder as he fancied that that trooper was still behind him, keeping pace with his every stride, ever gaining upon him, and yet always just behind him, just ready to clutch him!

In the bright midday sunlight he shivered, and then, "Millions," he murmured, "millions. Keep your head, you fool. The danger's past, the fortune's yours;" and, with a shivering laugh, he turned his face towards the ranch.

The day passed over the valley, the moon rose full upon it, and the cooling breezes roused some of those who, smitten badly, yet not to death, moved uneasily as they lay.

The man who had stood between Ralph Chesleigh and death lay cold, but the Englishman rolled from side to side, and moaned with the pain of his hurt. The bullet had done no more than shatter a bone in his arm; but falling in that ghastly heap he had deceived Stephen Harrington, and it was the blood of other men that smeared upon his face as though from an open wound. His youth and the freshening wind brought back his vigour, and with it came remembrance. He was free once more, free to fulfil his pledge, to keep his sacred oath. He rose to his feet and swayed from side to side, wondering which way to turn, wondering if he dare move at all. The wind grew stronger, with a whistle it came down between the hills, and he shivered in its clutches.

Where must he go? His memory was leaving him again, and all was becoming blank. There was a burning in his arm, which seemed to stop his every motion.

"Ralph, old chap, wake up," he cried. It was only a whisper, and the rising wind tore it from his mouth. "Wake up, my lad;

there is something for you to do. Something for you to do," he repeated weakly. "Something for you to do."

The moon grew dim, as the wind brought up the storm-clouds. Dimmer and dimmer, and then all was black.

"Something to do, old chap," he murmured helplessly. "It's—it's the Golden River—Phyllis—my oath! God! Give me light for a second, let me see my way. It's the ranch I want, the English ranch, where the youngster is; and that cur Harrington is after her, and will get there first."

Like a fury, the wind tore across the valley. For a second the moon peeped forth; and then, with a cry of excitement, he lurched from the tree, and stumbled towards the path to the south.

The blinding glare of the lightning guided him, and the storm he counted as nothing. Down it came in streaming torrents as if the gates of heaven had been opened. Down and down; and yet still he stumbled over the broken road-way, running and walking by turns, forgetting his throbbing wound, forgetting everything save his one object in view, the ranch. And as he ran deliriously he shouted, "The ranch, the ranch, I must get there first! Phyllis—Harrington—curse him, the traitor!"

And now he recognized the road a little, now it seemed to him that he must be getting near the spot; but his strength was failing, and it was only by his repeated encouragement to his beating heart that he urged himself along. He must get there first. He must fulfil his trust.

Just off the roadside a tiny glimmering light caught his eye, and with renewed vigour he hastened towards it, urging himself into a stumbling run, splashing through pools of water, falling and regaining his feet again in wild haste to reach the haven of refuge which seemed to ever recede as he

approached it. Then suddenly it disappeared, and he stood irresolute, trembling as he thought that he had been misled by his own imagination—he had followed some will-o'-the-wisp, some phantom of his brain, which had led him far astray; he had missed the ranch, he was alone, lost and bewildered, his mission unfulfilled. The whole world swam round him, as the horror of the disappointment came upon him, the aching in all his limbs, the burning of his wound now broke upon him in one terrible throb; and with a shriek he flung up his arms and fell backwards to the ground.

"What's that?"

"What's what?"

"I heard some one shriek for help," the man answered, rising from his rug.

"Light the candles and make the fire up, there's a good chap. It was only the wind."

"Wind be hanged! There's been a lot of skirmishing to-day. It was some poor wretch calling for help." And as he spoke the Englishman lighted a lantern and flung open the door, while his comrade, pausing only to kindle a torch at the fire, followed him.

The storm had passed, and with their lights high above their heads, they tramped over the sodden ground, gazing in every direction.

"Yes, you were right," one exclaimed at last, "here he is, poor chap." And he bent lower over the figure of Ralph, and, placing his arms beneath him, raised his head gently to his shoulder; and they walked slowly back towards the house.

"Water," he said, as he placed him upon a rug. "Bathe his face. What a ghastly sight, and only a boy, too! By heaven, it's the other English prisoner!"

"Pour a drop of brandy down his throat. That's better, he's coming round."

Ralph moved uneasily as he lay, and muttered, "Stephen Harring-

ton—the ranch—Phyllis!" And then with a shiver he opened his eyes and gazed wildly around him.

"Where am I?"

"It's all right, old chap. You're safe enough. Lie down, and go to sleep."

"No, no. I can't sleep, I mustn't. I must get on. I must get to the ranch, and rescue the child; it's my oath!"

"You're all right, you're at the ranch now."

"Then the child, the baby. Where is she?" And he started up and caught at the arm of one of the men.

"She's all right, safe and sound."

"Where?"

"With your comrade; he called and fetched her."

"Stephen Harrington?" he gasped.

"We don't know his name. He was the man who was a prisoner with you."

"Ah, Stephen Harrington, curse him," Ralph exclaimed wearily, "I am too late. Why did you let her go? I am wasting time here, I must follow him," and with a mighty effort he dragged himself to his feet. But his weakness was too much, and he tottered and fell back helpless.

"I can't do it," he cried, "I am too tired." And then for an instant his voice became stronger.

"You're Englishmen," he exclaimed, "and you know what an Englishman's oath is. I swear I'll track Stephen Harrington down, if it takes my whole life; and then if any harm has fallen upon the child through him, as sure as there's a God in Heaven, I'll kill him."

CHAPTER IX

THE AWAKENING

It was three months before Ralph Chesleigh recovered from the effects of his wound and the fever brought on by exposure, and then his newly-

found friends urged him to settle down with them upon the ranch, and he accepted, for in rising from what was almost his death-bed, he left behind him all knowledge of the past. His mind was a blank, a white sheet ready for new impressions and ideas, and the fever had wiped out the ugly black splotches of the past. Stephen Harrington, Phyllis, his trust, and his oath were gone and as dead as if they had never moved in his life at all.

His countrymen spent many an anxious hour debating between themselves whether they should bring back the horrors of the past, and remind him of the oath that he had sworn; conferences which, as time went on, were joined in by two bright English girls who had come out to share the rising fortunes of the men. And the decision always was the same: "Let well alone." He was happy, he was rich, perhaps presently he would marry; and then their farmhouses would become quite a little settlement in the now flourishing and peaceful province of Santa Teresa.

Let well alone! So it was decided; and the years grew apace, until the story of his coming was almost entirely forgotten.

The little shed where the two men were sleeping on that stormy night was now merely used as a barn; and two farmhouses, built exactly the same as in England, faced one another, resounding all day with the merry laughter and romps of two of the sturdiest families of children to be found in the whole of South America.

The little English settlement was growing. It only needed Ralph to marry now; and the two housewives became almost careworn wondering where they could find him a wife who should be as good as he.

"Uncle Ralph! Uncle Ralph!" A yell, a series of yells; and, like a whirlwind of rosy cheeks, bright eyes, and waving hair, the children

dashed towards the man riding over the plain.

He came back to the house with the two youngest perched upon either shoulder, and the others hanging on to his coat, laughing and romping as if he were a child himself again.

"Well, Ralph," a man asked, knocking the ashes from his pipe as the party reached him, "finished for the day?"

"Finished? Not I," he cried, with a laugh. "I'm going to start on the long-promised job at last. The old barn isn't safe with the youngsters knocking about. Down it comes to-day, and to-morrow we'll start building something worthy of us."

"I don't like to see the old shed go, Ralph. It's a sort of grave-stone of the past, reminds us of the time before we were successful, before all this happiness came to us. It seems like ill-treating an old friend to pull down the roof that sheltered us in those days."

"Eh, lad; it's really the shed where I was born, where you two chaps saved my life. I call it being born there, for I can't remember a day before my illness. Sometimes I can't help wondering who on earth I am."

"Why don't you go and start work, instead of talking, Ralph?" came a bright, girlish voice.

"She always interrupts you when you speak of the past," said the man, lighting his pipe.

"Yes, bless her, she knows it isn't good for me; and, after all, Harry, what does it matter? I'm as happy as a boy, and getting as rich as a little Croesus." Then with another laugh he strode towards the shed, with the children romping after him.

Then at his bidding they scampered back to the house again; and he unlocked the door, entered the little shed, and gazed curiously about him.

"I'm quite right, it ought to be pulled down," he exclaimed; "the

floor full of holes, and the walls ready to fall if they're touched."

"And to think I can remember nothing before this," he continued with a grave smile. "Nothing before waking up in this little shed, almost a man. Ah well! it's an odd thought, and work's good for odd thoughts; so off with your coat, my lad, and start."

The afternoon shadows lengthened, and yet the work of demolishing the shed seemed to make no progress. There was no sound from within, and the open door showed that only one board of the flooring had been torn up; and Ralph Chesleigh sat upon a box gazing at something which lay upon the ground before him. Both his hands were clasping his head, his elbows resting upon his knees, and his eyes staring as though they would leave their sockets.

The children found him so, and, frightened because he did not answer them, ran back to the house; and in a moment his two old comrades were by his side, following his staring gaze, fixed upon an emerald in a rough, heavy setting which lay upon the floor.

"What ails you, Ralph?" one of them asked, placing his hand upon the sitting man's shoulder.

"Hush! it's coming back," he whispered, in a tone which thrilled them. "The past is forcing itself back upon me. The Jewel of Death — Spencia Zanchez — Grace Stanton!"

"Let it rest, lad, let it come back gradually. Sleep, and wake refreshed to put your thoughts together."

"Do I look as though I could sleep?" he answered wildly, and, rising, strode excitedly around the shed.

"Grace Stanton—who was there besides? Ah, Phyllis, the youngster; and I swore to protect her. But some one else, too, a scoundrel, a liar, and a coward. My God! I've got them all together now." Stephen Harrington — the Golden

River! I remember it all. Phyllis was left with you, and that cur got here before me and stole her. For fifteen years I've been sleeping, sleeping while she has grown from a child to a woman; or, perchance, sleeping while that scoundrel has ensured the safety of his position by killing her."

He paused in his walk, and took a hand of each of his comrades.

"Good friends both," he cried, "men who have saved my life and cared for me, a stranger, as though I were a brother; but couldn't you at times have tried to awaken the past by telling me what you knew?"

"Immediately you recovered we spoke of it, but all was a blank to you; you were happy, and we thought it best to leave well alone."

"Eh, lads, you acted for the best, I know; but what has happened in fifteen years? It comes back to me now what an unscrupulous scamp Stephen Harrington was. He came here for the child only because of a secret of fabulous wealth upon her; and what was to prevent him forsaking her when he had gained his ends, and leaving her to die in that storm which brought me to your door?"

"He couldn't be so bad as that, Ralph."

"You did not know Stephen Harrington," he muttered; and together they walked back to the house again.

"She was just about baby's age," he said, as he caught the youngest toddler in his arms; "and now, if all has been well, she's a woman."

"Well, it belongs to the past now, Ralph. It was the will of Providence that the years should pass and you should know nothing. It is a story of the past."

"Of the past and the present too, Dick. For fifteen years I have forgotten my trust; now I have awakened, and must take it to my heart again."

"Leave us?"

"Yes, leave you all, old chap.

Leave you for a little while, leave you to hunt the world if necessary and deal vengeance upon that man, if vengeance is demanded; to regain for Phyllis Stanton her birth-right of which she has been robbed."

"And then, Ralph?"

"Then to return and continue my life here amongst my only friends."

They had reached the doorway, and the man laid his hand on Ralph Chesleigh's arm.

"When do you go?"

"At once; I have wasted too long. The oath that I swore in the past comes back to me."

Let it be to-morrow morning, Ralph; I ask it for the sake of the past. Ever since I found you outside, almost dead, we have all been as brothers. Our fortunes have grown together, and our happiness has ever been bound up with one another. You must leave, and we would not dissuade you from your duty; but let us spend a last evening all together, talking of the past and thinking of the day when you shall ride back to us again."

And so, for the sake of the friends he loved, Ralph consented; and that long evening was spent in building castles, until the wrench of parting almost passed away. He was to come back soon, and not alone; he must bring Phyllis with him, and point out to her the scenes where the early part, the tragic opening, of her life was spent, tell her all that happened and all he had done for her. The two English girls looked knowingly at one another through eyes a little dim. Phyllis must be about twenty now, and Ralph had saved her life, and would save her fortune.

Then with the morning came the parting, a parting that was sad, and yet relieved by those dreams of the night before. It was not for long; he would be always writing, and soon back, laden with presents from England for the children, and Phyllis by his side.

And so, with handshakes again

and again, with a few tears and many blessings, he turned his back on what had been his home, and set forth to keep his oath.

CHAPTER X

FACE TO FACE

MR. STEPHEN HARRINGTON entered his club in Piccadilly, and the whole place became, as it were, the property of that gentleman. Stephen Harrington, the millionaire, the almost annual millionaire—for who could say what that fabulously rich Golden River Mine produced in one year?

He entered his club, and its most deferential servants became, if anything, even more deferential still.

There were a host of men who sought to catch his eye and gain a nod, a host who whispered to a friend, "That's Harrington," and wished they might claim a closer acquaintance; for every club, even the most fashionable, does not boast a millionaire amongst its members, unless it be an American one—and they have grown so common as to be almost bad form.

It cannot be said that Stephen Harrington merely entered his club; he swaggered in, as if it existed for himself alone. And there were a few who shrugged their shoulders and turned away—a few who dared to confess, and openly so, that he ought not to have been elected, millionaire though he was, and that the club was for men, and not for ill-bred boors.

"Here, Brand," he shouted at the top of his voice, "Brand, I can't give you what I would at home, but a bottle of champagne won't hurt you, I suppose. Abominable stuff, but it's the best they've got."

It was Mr. Harrington's habit to speak so when he entertained a guest at one of the first social clubs in London.

Stephen Harrington had altered very little in appearance since the time of his flight from Santa Teresa. A little stouter, a little older looking, and certainly a good deal more blustering than he was in those days; but still the same sort of man, with his shifty eyes that never maintained an instant's steady gaze at any one, but flickered and turned away, and were in strange contrast to the bombastic and assertive manner he affected in voice and gesture, seeming to proclaim: "I'm worth millions of money as it is, and goodness only knows how many more millions I shall yet have behind me." It was certainly Stephen Harrington's money and social position that had obtained for him admittance to the Bohemian Club, for on his personal merits he would inevitably have been blackballed in that cosmopolitan rendezvous of the artistic, musical, and literary talent of London.

He was at once a cultivated and disliked man, boorish to the extreme, without an atom of consideration for the feelings of other people, selfish to the backbone, and hard-fisted at a bargain. Stephen Harrington of to-day was the natural evolution of Stephen Harrington the coward and traitor of fifteen years ago.

He was still a bachelor, never having allowed any sentimental feelings for womankind to overcome his own dominant love of self. There was no one in the whole world he cared for half as much as himself, although he did spare a certain amount of consideration for Phyllis Stanton, whom, perhaps from a dormant sense of justice, perhaps merely from motives of policy, he had not cast out upon the world, but had looked after (and be it admitted, to give the devil his due, looked after well) from the time that he took her from the ranch, with the papers of her inheritance hidden upon her, that birthright, the Golden River Mine,

upon the proceeds of which he had lived in luxury for years. To the world she figured as Harrington's daughter; he had allowed it to be assumed that he was a widower, and even the girl herself was in ignorance of her real birth and parentage.

Phyllis Stanton had grown up to be as sweet a type of English budding womanhood as ever charmed the eye of man. Tall and fair, with a wealth of chestnut hair falling in masses about her shapely shoulders, clear-cut features, small and perfect; and eyes that were a wonder in themselves, deep blue, with a depth of tenderness in them that was almost sadness.

Alfred Brand, the particular friend and companion of Stephen Harrington, was an individual of a distinctly different style from that gentleman. A smart, natty man, fairly good-looking, very dark, and with a healthy complexion, a fine-pointed moustache, and the keen, bright eye of a man accustomed to living by his brains. His manner was sharp as a needle, and his nerves as cool as a cucumber. In the course of a varied existence, mainly devoted to living by his wits, Mr. Brand had struck some very successful things, but never before had he hit anything quite so remunerative to himself as Stephen Harrington, who, in an unguarded moment years ago, under the influence of more champagne than was good for him, had let fall a few words which, while they gave Brand no actual clue to his past career, were sufficient to awaken the astuteness of that gentleman's mind.

While Harrington, being unable to decide from the insinuating hints that Brand indulged in from time to time how much he really knew, was compelled to maintain a friendship with him for fear of his suddenly changing into an enemy.

Still, after all, Harrington could afford it; and as for Brand, so long as he made money he was

contented, and being an unscrupulous, calculating individual, there were many little schemes in which he was of considerable advantage to Harrington, so that the position was very much one of *quid pro quo*.

From the day of his return to England up to the present time Fortune had seemed to enlist herself on his side, and wealth had poured into his coffers. Stephen Harrington, the sole owner of the Golden River Mine, in the province of Santa Teresa, South America, was one of the best known, least liked, and most envied individuals who frequented Capel Court, entertained in Mayfair, and lounged away his evenings in the promenades of variety theatres, or in making himself objectionable, as he was doing to-night, at his club.

No thought of Ralph Chesleigh ever entered his brain now. For the first few weeks after his flight from South America, the idea had come across him in some restless hour of the night that perhaps Ralph was not dead, after all; but as weeks lengthened into months, and months spread themselves into years, and there was never a sign of the man, all thought of him became obliterated from his selfish mind, and he lived only for himself and to enjoy the abundant riches that Fortune simply poured into his lap.

Little did Harrington dream that to-night, after fifteen years of safety and security, the sudden rude awakening was at hand.

"Here's luck to you, Brand, my boy!" he said, as he picked up his glass of champagne and drank it at a gulp.

Brand nodded, and sipped his wine more leisurely.

"It's about the worst ballet I ever saw in my life!" jerked out Harrington, referring to the entertainment they had just quitted. "What on earth people can see in the shows that are put on in London now, I can't understand."

Brand agreed with Stephen—he

always found it worth while to do so in those merely trivial matters—and took a cigar that the millionaire offered him.

"Beastly bad cigars at this infernal club," said Harrington, although the Havana he was smoking was an excellent one.

Again Brand agreed.

"Now, look here, Brand," he continued, lolling back on the comfortable lounge and fixing his eye on a picture adorning the wall, representing a particularly chic damsel teasing an exceedingly austere priest, who did not, however, seem to object very much, "what about that offer of Sherley's? You know that——"

He said no more. His voice broke off short, a ghastly pallor overspread his features, the cigar dropped from his fingers on to the beaten copper top of the little table in front of him and rolled unheeded to the ground.

Brand turned to look at him, wondering why he had stopped so suddenly; and, cold and phlegmatic as his temperament usually was, he received a shock at the change that had come over his friend. Stephen's face seemed absolutely deathly. Every vestige of colour had faded from his cheeks, and he stared with frightened eyes before him as though he saw a ghost.

"What's the matter?" Brand exclaimed, starting up. "You look as white as a sheet: what's the matter with you?"

Harrington strove to answer, but a terror seemed to paralyse his speech; and still his eyes glared straight before him towards the stained glass doors of the smoking-room, where a group of men, who had just entered, stood talking together. Brand followed his gaze, and saw amongst them a stranger—a man he had never met in the club before—a fine, tall, good-looking fellow of some five-and-thirty years of age, with crisp, curling hair and well-set, determined features.

His face was bronzed as one who had returned from foreign travel, and as he stood there chatting at his ease, Brand wondered whether he could have anything to do with the sudden illness of Stephen Harrington.

He turned again to his host, who had recovered a little, and led him to an open window; and they stood side by side looking out at the wonderful picture of the West End of London by night, with its flashing lights, its swiftly moving vehicles, and the murmuring hum of life that floated to their ears.

"How do you feel now?" he asked.

"Better, a little better," gasped Harrington. "I'd like a drop of brandy, though."

Brand called to a passing waiter, and the brandy was brought. Harrington swallowed it at a draught, and made a strong effort to pull himself together.

"You'd better go home."

"No, no," he answered, his eye wandering towards the door. "I'll sit down and rest a bit. I shall be all right presently; it's this infernal hot weather."

He sat down again with Brand beside him, but this time on a lounge further off and partly screened from observation by a palm in a Japanese bowl.

It was obvious to Brand that there was something a great deal more than the heat and a sudden faintness about the consternation of his companion.

The group near the entrance had settled down to the enjoyment of whisky and soda and the telling of club-room stories; and Harrington, who had been watching them carefully, presently got up and sauntered through the curtains towards the supper-room, and the other exit, Brand following closely behind him. He had almost got clear of the smoking-room when a man who had been writing letters at a side table suddenly looked up and greeted him with—

"Hullo, Harrington!"

The millionaire gave a start, which was certainly unaccountable when a friend had merely called out his name, glanced over his shoulder with a frightened look, and started forward as though to dash out of the club. The stranger, as the name of Harrington fell upon his ears, sprang excitedly from his seat, overturning his glass and astounding his companions; and it was the erect figure of Ralph Chesleigh that met Stephen Harrington's gaze as he looked back into the smoking-room.

It had come at last! Vengeance had been very laggard, but the hour had come at last!

Harrington gripped Brand by the arm and made towards the doorway.

"Come on," he said, "let's get out into the air."

Ralph Chesleigh stood with his eyes blazing passion, his nostrils dilated, and his hands tightly clenched. At last the time had come.

"What's the matter?" his friend asked, touching him upon the shoulder, but he made no reply; and, walking to Harrington, he caught him firmly by the arm and slowly turned him until they stood face to face.

"So, Stephen, we meet again," he cried fiercely; and then, suddenly remembering he was the guest of a friend, moderated his tone and pointed to a chair.

"Sit down," he said quietly; and the group sat around the little table.

"So we meet again, Stephen," he repeated, raising his voice no more than as if the conversation were but ordinary, "after fifteen years."

"You have made a mistake," the man whispered, his fingers tightening and relaxing, his shifty eyes gazing everywhere but in the faces of the two men who sat opposite him. "I do not know you; I have never seen you before."

"You poor miserable liar! You wretched swindling thief! Look at your own face, and see if you dare pretend such folly."

The millionaire gazed mechanically at a mirror, and started at his own reflection; and then he felt a hand resting on his shoulder. It gripped him, and he looked up and caught the cold eye of Brand.

Alfred Brand had been placed in just such an awkward position as Harrington was many times in his adventurous career, and he could be as cool and collected under such circumstances as a veteran under fire. The quiet unconcern in his face gave courage to the millionaire; he felt he was not alone, he had strong support behind him, and so the colour came back a little to his ashen face, and his hands ceased to tremble.

"We will walk home together, Stephen, and you shall account for the last fifteen years."

Harrington felt the pressure on his arm again, and it gave him more courage still.

"We will do nothing of the kind," he blustered. "Who are you? Who is this man you have brought into the club to insult members, Mr. Stewart?"

"Yes, who is he?" came Brand's sneering voice from behind. "My friend Mr. Harrington, suffering from poor health, has been seriously upset by the maniac."

Ralph eyed the new speaker steadily from head to foot, and the stare was unconcernedly returned by Brand. "I can well imagine he would be a friend of yours!" Ralph quietly remarked.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean he is a thief, and he's found a fit associate."

"It is useless to prolong this discussion," Alfred Brand responded mildly.

"I have no discussion with you at all," Ralph interjected. "If your friend does not mind your hearing, you may remain while I turn his recollection to the past."

"I know nothing about you or your past," the millionaire broke in sharply, and made to rise; but a look from Ralph held him back.

"I have called you a thief in public, and I will prove it. You are the possessor of the Golden River Mine, which you bought for a few pounds from the Province of Santa Teresa, having stolen the location from a child to whom it was left by her father."

"It's a lie!"

"It's the truth—Phyllis Stanton, a child I had sworn to protect. And you stole her from me and her wealth from her. You saw her father, your own comrade, shot in South America."

"It is a lie, I say, a lie! You've got to prove it."

"He is a blackmailer," murmured Alfred Brand.

"You saw her mother killed by Spercia Zanchez!"

"I've never been in South America in my life. It's an impudent lie."

"She was killed by the Jewel of Death. You don't remember that, you scoundrel, do you?"

"'Pon my word it's most amusing," murmured Brand.

"What's the Jewel of Death?"

"A jewel that to wear is certain death," Ralph responded; and the millionaire smiled scornfully. And then the smile oozed away as Ralph, slipping his hand in his pocket, produced and opened a small case. "This is the 'Jewel of Death,' Harrington, which you've never seen, and naturally don't believe in. Very well, prove it, you coward; grip it in your hand!"

CHAPTER XI

CHI MIN'S OPIUM DEN

As Ralph Chesleigh drew the case from his pocket Harrington started back in his chair, and when the emerald was flung upon the table

he sat looking at it with dilated eyes—the whole scene of the murder of Grace Stanton back in his memory, the whole of the cowardice in his nature, tinged with a superstitious dread, holding him speechless. The end had come! But no, a new thought arose in his cowardly little mind. Make terms with Ralph, secure a share. Anything was better than nothing; a quarter, a fifth, a tenth, even to be allowed to hold what he had got.

"You remember the stone, Stephen?"

"I remember——"

"He remembers nothing," Brand sharply interjected; and then he turned to Ralph. "I do not know what your game is, or what you want, and I do not care. You may have a claim against Mr. Harrington, or you may be bouncing—take it which way you like. I'm his business manager; send your claim in, and we'll consider it."

"You impudent scoundrel!" Ralph cried in fury, but the restraining hand of his friend touched his shoulder, and disgust found vent only in looks.

"Any one in London will tell you Stephen Harrington's address," Brand continued superciliously, "write; but mind you don't go too far, we'll stand no nonsense. Curse your Jewel of Death twaddle. Let's know what you want, and why you want it. Come along, Stephen," and linking his arm with that of the millionaire, he drew him away and out of the club.

Again Ralph made to follow them, again the hand of his friend held him back, and he sank into a seat and gasped with rage.

"I'm sorry," he said at last, turning to the man. "I'm ashamed of myself; I should have remembered I am your guest."

"Don't trouble," Stewart answered quietly; "the millionaire is no friend of mine. The men I know are paupers compared with him; but they're men."

"He's a scoundrel!"

"No doubt. Tell me your trouble; that is," he added hastily, "if you care to, or if you think I can be of any use to you."

"I'm sure you can, Stewart; I've been out of the world for twenty years, and have lost touch with it. I have been longing to find this man, thinking that when I found him all would be done, and now I find it is only the beginning."

"He's got a clever rogue to back him."

"Eh, Brand!"

"Sharp as needles and utterly unscrupulous. But let me advise you, if I can."

Then, keeping his own deeds in the background as much as possible, Ralph told the history of the past in South America, from the days of the flight and murder of Grace Stanton to the time when, at the English ranch, he recovered his memory; and, with only an interjectory interruption here and there, his friend heard him through.

"Now you know all, old chap. What shall I do?"

"If we were in South America," Stewart retorted slowly, "I should say, 'Shoot at sight'; but we're in England."

"Well?"

"Compromise."

"Compromise?"

"Ay, come to an arrangement."

"You're mad!" Ralph burst out angrily.

"No, I'm sane and very matter of fact. See here, Ralph, I believe every word you have told me, but

"But?"

"You've no proofs, old chap, absolutely none. The world, who admires a millionaire, would call you an impudent blackmailer. Harrington alone, I believe, you could have forced into restoration; backed by Brand, he'll laugh at you. As a man of the world, I say, all the right is on your side, but you don't stand a chance.

Compromise, arrange it, take what you can get."

"I want nothing myself," Ralph interrupted hastily, "it's for the youngster. I want to find out where she is, and restore what belongs to her. I swore I'd look after her."

"How old is this youngster?" Stewart asked with a quiet smile.

"She was about four then."

"So now she would be about twenty."

"If alive."

"Then reassure yourself on that; Miss Phyllis Harrington, one of the prettiest girls in London, is reported to be about twenty."

"Phyllis Harrington!"

"Yes, he passes as a widower."

"And you think it is she?"

"The ages coincide; if it is not she, who is it?"

Ralph sat buried in thought, and for a moment his companion did not interrupt him. Then, "Look here, Ralph," he exclaimed, "make sure it's the same girl. You don't want the money, and Harrington seems to be treating her well. Make sure the Golden River will revert to her, tie up her settlements in millions, and leave the matter there; that's my advice. You've nothing to fight upon, and, setting aside the fact that Harrington is a rogue, there's no need to fight. He's living on some of her money; but she can spare it. See him and settle the matter quietly; that's my advice as a man of the world."

"And, looking at it from a cold point of view, I believe you're right," Ralph answered; "I'll think it over well."

Brand and Harrington walked down Piccadilly arm in arm, and their expressions were a study. A lurking terror twitched the muscles of Harrington's sallow face, while a dawning light seemed bursting upon Brand, who saw the possibility of squeezing his patron in the future to an extent he had never dreamed of in the past.

Mr. Alfred Brand was a very discreet man, and he waited for Harrington to speak first; but the millionaire did nothing except bite at his twitching lips and walk on as one in a dream. Presently he spoke; it was only one word. "Curse!" he said.

Alfred Brand looked at him out of the corners of his eyes, and very sly and crafty eyes they were with that side expression.

"Of course, it's annoying," he answered soothingly; "but, my dear Harrington, don't worry about it. It was only an impudent attempt at blackmail. You won't see the man again; it isn't likely."

If Harrington had glanced at Brand, he would have seen that after giving vent to these words of comfort he had his tongue in his cheek; but the millionaire did not look up, he was deep in thought.

He knew well enough the risk he ran in putting himself altogether in Brand's hands, but there seemed to be no other course.

"I say, Brand!"

"What is it, old chap?"

"That man isn't exactly a black-mailer. He's got a lot of power over me—power to ruin me, to take the Golden River from me."

"No, you don't mean it!" the man answered, with an admirably simulated start of surprise.

"But I do, curse him! He can do it, and he will!"

"Are his proofs so strong?"

"He hasn't any; but he knows the whole story, and knows to whom the mine rightfully belongs."

"Who's that?" Brand asked.

"Phyllis."

"Oh, she isn't your daughter, then?"

"No!"

"Does she know the mine is hers?"

"No; she knows nothing."

"And this man has no proofs?"

"Absolutely none; but he knows all."

"Well, you must be mad to think

of giving up anything. Tell him to do his worst."

"I dare not, he'd kill me. He's got a long score against me. If I don't give up all, he'll shoot me. I know him, and you don't."

"Then shoot first!"

The men walked onward without exchanging another word for full five minutes.

"Shoot first," Brand exclaimed again.

"I'd make the man rich for life who got rid of him!" Harrington whispered hoarsely.

"Well, murder's an ugly job, Harrington, a very ugly job, indeed; which I, for one, don't mean to undertake—I've too much respect for my neck. But suppose we could get him kidnapped, eh?"

"Kidnapped!" ejaculated Harrington. "How?"

"We'd have to get him down to the docks and aboard a boat at night, and——"

"And what?"

"Well, sometimes accidents happen to boats, eh? But it will be an expensive thing to carry out; and since your life depends upon getting rid of him, I suppose you're ready to foot the bill to any amount."

"Yes, to any amount," agreed Harrington. "I shall never sleep in peace again till he's put out of the way!"

"Right! Now look here. By one of the biggest pieces of luck in the world, I've got an interest in a boat that's going to start for Lisbon to-morrow; and we'll just hunt up the skipper to-night and see if he'll take a passenger for the benefit of his health. Come along!—Hansom!"

A cab drew up at his call, the two men sprang in, and Brand gave the address—Limehouse. The cabman growled at the distance; but the promise of good pay consoled him, and away they rattled.

"Where's he to be found?" asked Stephen, as they bowled along.

"Ten to one, at his only pleasure, opium smoking, the besotted brute," rejoined Brand.

They left the West End behind them, and drove on through the silent and deserted City eastwards, until they reached the squalid neighbourhood they sought, lying low down by the oozy riverside, where its ugly and ill-lighted streets seemed as a labyrinth to the uninitiated—this one leading to a *cul de sac* where lurked, perhaps, death; while the next wound tortuously towards the black water lapping against the wharves. The rising wind fluttered the flames of the street lamps until they showed like blue transparent beads, while in grimy corners and unsuspected angles of buildings lurked the refuse of many nationalities.

By and bye Brand stopped the cab; and, telling the man to wait, which he objected to do until he had had a sovereign in advance; walked on as one who knew the road, and turned up a narrow, smelly courtyard, halting before the doorway of a shuttered shop, upon the signboard of which was the name, "Chi Min" and some legend in Chinese characters. Round about the entrance lounged some half a dozen Celestials, in long, loose blouses, and with oily, shining pigtails, who jabbered in their native tongue, and leered from almond-shaped eyes at the visitors in a way that sent Harrington's spine cold.

"It's all right, Brand, I suppose?" he murmured.

"Yes, I've been here before to-day," the man rejoined, and his assertion was corroborated by the yellow heathen Chi Min, the keeper of the opium den, who, with a ghastly, grinning smile of greeting, took the money Brand dropped into his claw-like hand, held the curtain of the doorway open for them to enter, and then led the way up the creaking staircase.

"Lika smoka oppia?" he crooned, tightening his bony fin-

gers over the gold that Brand had given him. "Lika smoka oppia?" he repeated, as he pushed open a door on the first landing and motioned the two to enter.

The room—a square, stuffy apartment—was almost in darkness, save for one lamp with an orange papershade that hung from the ceiling in the middle of the den, and rendered the complexion of the recumbent figures scattered around more bilious and unhealthy still.

Stretched everywhere about the place on frayed and frowsy rugs and cushions lay a motley heap of humanity in various stages of narcotic drowsiness—here a Hindoo, there a Lascar, and everywhere Chinamen. In a far corner reclined at full length a rough seafaring man, sunk deep in the lethargy induced by the drug; a hang-dog looking ruffian, his brawny chest heaving through his open shirt, while round his waist was knotted a crimson handkerchief that only half concealed a murderous clasp-knife.

Chi Min, all the while rubbing his skinny palms together, found lounges for his new customers and set to work to prepare their pipes.

The muggy, stifling atmosphere of the den, the insufferable heat, and the utter want of ventilation were already making Harrington feel qualms, and he whispered to Brand to quickly find the man they were in search of and get out into the open air again.

Chi Min, still crooning to himself, clapped his hands, and from behind a dirty curtain a young native of the Flowery Land came forward, carrying a wooden tray, with two cracked saucers upon it, in each of which was a little dab of thick, dark, viscous fluid.

He shuffled across to Chi Min, who took them from him, and then from a recess he brought a couple of small brass lamps, and, lighting the slender wicks, which burnt up smokily, set them before the

Englishmen and moved away again.

Chi Min dipped a long, thin wire, like a bonnet pin, into the opium, and, gathering a little of the sticky mass upon its point, twirled it rapidly round and round until a tiny ball, no larger than a pea, was formed, adhering to its point. He thrust this into the flame of the lamp, waited till the opium boiled and spluttered and sent forth a nauseating odour, and then, dropping it into the bowl of a metal-headed pipe, handed it to Brand, and repeated the operation for Harrington.

"Lika smoka pipa oppia?" he intoned as he bent over his work.

"I'm not going to smoke that stuff," Stephen exclaimed, as the Chinaman handed him the pipe.

"All right, you needn't; just sit here while I see if I can wake the skipper," and he got up and threaded his way through the recumbent forms upon the ground, under the sickly yellow lamp-light, towards the back of the den.

The poor wretches who found in opium the sole consolation that life now held for them were lolling in all attitudes about the floor and on the benches running round the walls. Some lay there quite motionless, with a horrible smile breaking around their drawn lips, where discoloured teeth protruded, as they dreamed in languid rapture of some heathen paradise. Others, who had slept off one fit of stupor to prepare for another, squatted before their smoky little lamp and twirled a long pin, upon which more opium bubbled and seethed in its flame; roasted it to the dull red heat of their accustomed liking, dropped it into the metal bowl of the pipe, and, inhaling the smoke, became as logs again.

Moving between the prostrate figures, Brand made his way towards the sailor, who had been tossing and turning on his mat, and had now aroused himself sufficiently to thud upon the floor with

the haft of his sheath-knife, and to blasphemously demand more opium.

Chi Min came over to him, but at a gesture from Brand the Chinaman stopped and silently shuffled back to his seat near the doorway; while Brand, seizing the sailor by the shoulder, shook him roughly to and fro.

"Wake up, you drunken brute!" he shouted, "Here, come on now, Battent, wake up!"

The man rolled over, stupidly murmuring, "Opium, Chi Min; more opium."

"For lord's sake, let's get out of this," came the voice of Harrington, wafted across the oppressive atmosphere where the smoke rings lazily betook themselves upwards; "it's enough to choke a black."

"Wake up, do you hear? Wake up! We've got a job for you to look after, a sight better than besotting yourself here," cried Brand, shaking the fellow backwards and forwards again, and causing a glimmer of comprehension to gradually dawn upon him. The sailor shaded his eyes with his hand and peered out as one looking from the deck of a ship across the sea.

"Mister Brand?" he said stupidly.

"Let's get out of this hole," came the pleading voice of Harrington again. "Bring that brute along with you; he'll be more sensible in the air."

"All right," he answered; and half dragging, half supporting the man, Brand and Harrington passed out into the night again, leaving Chi Min still crooning and chafing his claw-like hands over one another as he looked around and nodded at his little sleeping flock—some still cooking their spluttering pills of opium, some gently inhaling the insidious drug, and some far away in a weird dreamland, lying inert, the pipes fallen from their relaxed fingers and their fallow features shining like waxen masks, beneath the yellow lamplight.

Out in the street even the air of Limehouse was refreshing after the miasmal den that they had quitted, and as they walked the man that they had come to seek recovered his senses a little.

"It's too late to fix up anything with him to-night," said Harrington; "what are we going to do?"

"Oh, we'll take him in the cab to your place, and he'll be all serene in the morning."

Harrington would have feebly protested, but he realized that in Brand now lay his protection, and so they turned the corner to where the cab awaited them, and drove off up the West India Dock Road, and so from the squalor and the grime, the reeking night-smell of the East End, and its opium den, to the early morning in the West, where the cooling breeze blew across the Green Park, and somewhere near to two o'clock they entered Harrington's house by a side door and sat down to whisky and soda in his smoking-room.

CHAPTER XII

PHYLLIS STANTON

In that branch of London society which hangs upon the fringe of the best circles, and just now and again, at long intervals, is seen at a really fashionable gathering, there was no woman more envied than Mrs. Neville Whyte. It had not always been so, however; and she occasionally looked back with a shiver to the days when, compelled by a decent social position in life, the Neville Whytes were bound "to keep up appearances" in public, and yet scraped and starved, lived from hand to mouth, and got head over ears in debt in private—that miserable existence that semi-fashionable society knows so well.

But it is good to be born lucky. Fortune waved her hand, and Mrs.

Neville Whyte became the chaperon of Miss Phyllis Harrington, upon arrangements so prodigal that even she was bewildered, and long-suffering tradesmen were astounded by payments in full and further orders that they were only too delighted to satisfy.

Mrs. Neville Whyte became a power. A lady by birth, her soul had revolted against the false position she had held. Her temper had raged at being the poor relation at the feasts of her better married sisters. But now all was over, and what was better still, she had grown to have a genuine affection for the girl under her charge, with at times a thought for her only son Reginald, the most fatuous, weak-minded youth that a clever woman could boast of for her son. Reginald himself had secret ambitions with regard to Phyllis; but as his mother had unceremoniously warned him that too much attention from him might lead to a break in the pleasant existing arrangements, and a return to gilt-edged poverty, he wisely kept his ambitions to himself.

The carriage placed at the disposal of Mrs. Neville Whyte stopped at the door of Stephen Harrington's house, and Phyllis, politely declining the attentions of her chaperon, alighted and entered; for, owing to a bad headache, she had pleaded to be released from her engagements and had returned home for a quiet evening and a rest far from the inanities of polite society, which only wearied her.

A remark which reached her ears through the door, imprudently left ajar, of Stephen Harrington's study, caused her to halt, and scarcely knowing why she did so, she drew near and listened.

"If I don't kill him, he'll kill me!" Harrington exclaimed; "and he's got to go."

"Yes, he's got to go," the icy voice of Brand answered. "With him gone, you're safe, eh?"

"Absolutely."

"Phyllis doesn't know you're not her father!"

"How the deuce should she?"

The girl sighed as she heard the words, and it was almost a sigh of relief. That Stephen Harrington was not her father came as a sudden shock which numbed, but above it was a sensation of relief. For years she had tortured herself with thoughts of her own wickedness that she could not feel a grain of affection for the man who should have been all in all to her; at times her soul had sickened because she knew her own feeling was aversion; and now that at least was clear. Her intuition had been greater than her knowledge. Her aversion to him need bring no shame to her.

Alfred Brand's voice broke the thread of her thoughts. Brand, the man she hated and shivered at when he was near her, the evil genius of the one she had been taught to call father.

"It's as simple as possible," he exclaimed. "As we arranged last night with Battent, the man's put on the boat, he's drugged so that he can't move; in the Channel the boat is scuttled and deserted. Good-bye to the *Deliverance*—pretty name—and Ralph Chesleigh!"

"The *Deliverance*, Ralph Chesleigh," she murmured, as one trying to fix a name upon one's memory.

"Sounds safe as houses," Stephen Harrington remarked with a chuckle. "But Battent and the crew, they'll have us in their power."

"What a slow brain you've got, Stephen. They're doing the job, not we. They'll be well paid, and won't be such fools as to try any bounce on us. If they do——" The sentence was completed by a low hiss as the man drew his breath through his teeth.

"Need we appear at all?" Harrington asked nervously.

"Of course we need. Let's see

the boat off, and when she's reported missing we know how we stand."

"All right, Brand, I leave it to you."

"Of course you do," he replied contemptuously, "you'd be a fool if you didn't. We go round to the *Alliance Hotel*; send a message up to him, and ask him to drive back and talk the matter over. In the cab we can drug him."

"I don't like that," Harrington nervously interjected.

"Of course you don't. You've got an idea of three men fighting with a chloroformed handkerchief, like a transpontine melodrama. See this syringe? Well, a touch of that, a pin-prick on the wrist, and it's all over."

"Ah!"

"Then full speed to Limehouse. The *Deliverance* is ready. Clap him aboard, and the game's over: the fortune's yours, and you've got an easy mind. Come along, I've arranged about the cab. One of your carriages wouldn't do for this job. Come on, it's time we started."

"Is that man Battent safe?"

"Quite safe, Stephen; there are about twenty men in London I've got right under my thumb. They're very handy."

"Very handy indeed," the millionaire agreed, but there was a tremor in his voice as he thought how safely he was there, too.

The men moved; and Phyllis, gathering her skirts in her hand, hastened up the stairs with only one idea in her mind. A diabolical scheme for taking a man's life had been planned in her hearing, and she must thwart it. Her maid was sleeping, and, taking no notice of her, she quietly changed her evening costume for a travelling dress and threw a cloak over her shoulders.

"Where are you going?" It was her maid who startled her by snapping the question at her. Another little straw which showed which way the wind blew, another

little sign of Brand's power in the Harrington household; for Judith Brand, a cousin of that gentleman, was probably the most unfit person to be the maid of a young and sensitive girl that could be found in the whole of London.

Possessing the type of features vulgarly known as hatchet-faced, with her black hair parted in the centre and plastered down on either side, with, hard, cold eyes, eyebrows that met in the middle, and a thin, cruel-looking mouth, she gave Phyllis an unaccountable horror whenever she was in the room with her; and so, for a salary which was ten times the ordinary amount, she had practically nothing at all to do.

"What are you talking about, Judith?" Phyllis exclaimed, turning towards her.

"I beg your pardon, miss," she answered, with cringing humility. "I had been sleeping, and spoke almost without knowing it. Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, order the carriage—no, a cab—to be at the door in five minutes," she answered; and a little while after Phyllis, declining Judith's suggestion that she should accompany her, entered the vehicle and instructed the man to drive sharp to the *Alliance Hotel*.

The difficulties of her position now began to dawn upon her, she had to meet an utter stranger, and warn him to beware of the man who posed before the world as her father. In the rush of excitement she had forgotten the awkwardness of the task she had undertaken; but it was too late to turn back—she would not if she could, she told herself. This man's life depended upon her action, and she would be as bad as those who plotted if she hesitated.

The cab drew up at the *Alliance Hotel*, and alighting, she hastily passed into the entrance hall and asked for Mr. Ralph Chesleigh.

"Yes, he was staying there, but," the manager regretted, "not ten

minutes since two friends had called for him, and he had driven away with them."

The girl turned faint as he told her. She was too late, too late by a few moments—the time she had spent in changing her dress. There was only one thing to do now—acquaint the police, and have the boat stopped before she cleared the river.

"Drive to the nearest police-station," she directed, and entered the vehicle again. Then doubts sprang up. It would mean a long term of imprisonment, a heavy punishment, for the man who, with all his villainy, had treated her well; and, again, could the police help her? Would there not have to be a warrant granted first? It all meant delay, and delay meant death.

In a second she made up her mind again.

"Cabman!"

He pulled up his horse and listened.

"Yus, miss."

"Do you know Limehouse?"

"Yus, miss; what part?"

"The river."

"Yus, I know it. Can't go there for less than a quid—a suvrin."

"Drive quickly, and I'll give you two. Here, take them now, and make haste."

"Right you are, miss," he answered with alacrity. "I'll get you there in no time; and a very rum go it all is," he continued, urging his horse to a jerky gallop.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DOOMED SHIP

"LIMEHOUSE, miss."

With a start, the girl aroused herself and looked around. It seemed she had been driving for hours. With the Royal Exchange and the Bank left behind, all re-

membrance of locality had fled ; and since then it had been a confused dream of dirty streets, which got dirtier as they drove onwards, rough roads which were rougher, and misery and poverty which were more acute and which more openly paraded itself as she penetrated further into that part of the world which had been known to her only in the abstract—squalid riverside London.

"Whereabouts, miss ?"

"The river," she answered mechanically. "There's a boat I want to get to there—the *Deliverance*."

"It will take some finding," the man muttered as he gathered up the reins again. "It's a rum go, that's what it is ; an out and out rum go. Get up, there !"

The last remark was addressed to the horse, and the animal "got up" and went along at a walking pace until pulled up with a jerk outside a beerhouse.

"Any of you chaps know a boat called the *Deliverance* ?" the cabman shouted to a group of loafers leaning against the wall.

"Yus, lyin' abaht a quarter mile dahn the river," one answered.

"Joe Battent's boat ; and it's abaht as bloomin' well rotten as it's bloomin' captin."

"Well, here's a lady wants to get out to her."

"Strike ! 'Taint Joe's wife, is it ?"

"You just stow yer lip, can't yer," a man exclaimed, coming out of the group. "Don't try and be funny, cos it don't suit yer beauty."

He had caught sight of the girl's white face through the window, and he touched his cap as he leant forward.

"I can see yer aboard, miss, if yer want'er go," he whispered hoarsely.

"Yes, I must go," she answered. "I'll pay you for your trouble," and she put something into his hand which he gazed at for a second, chuckled, and dropped into his

pocket, dived after it again, and then held it back to her.

"You've given me 'alf a suvrin," he said.

"Isn't it enough ?"

"Lord bless yer eyes, it's ten time mor'en enough."

"Then take me there as soon as you can."

Without a word, the man caught the horse's bridle, turned the cab sharply down an alley, dark as pitch, and then led them through a series of narrow byways until, after a few moments, they stood by the side of the river.

"There's a boat here I can borror," he explained. "That's the *Deliverance*, there. Goin' to keep the keb ?"

"Yes, tell him to wait," she answered, and shivered as she gazed at the black stream before her, only broken here and there by the greasy smear of a reflected light from a vessel or a flickering lamp by the water's side.

He took off his coat and flung it upon a seat in the stern of the boat, and then, stepping into it, held out his hand.

"Wait by the pub," he called to the cabman ; "I'll bring the lady up to yer. Now, miss, give us yer 'and."

She drew back instinctively, and looked anxiously around her. The whole place seemed to fill her with terror.

"Lor, there ain't no danger," he cried ; "yer don't want to go back now ?"

No, she didn't want to go back. It roused the determination in her ; and, taking his hand, she stepped into the swaying craft, and he pushed off from the side. The jerk of starting caused her to clutch the side of the boat, and she drew back her hand with a gasp, for the cold, sweaty stickiness of it seemed to penetrate beyond her skin and fill her soul with loathsome horror.

Everywhere was a black, nameless dread, everywhere a silence like the grave, only broken by the sickly

gurgle of the water against the sides of the boat or the breathing of the man as he laboured against the tide.

She sat fascinated, gazing at him without a word as he swung to and fro, now and again glancing over his shoulder. It seemed a dream, a nightmare, too horrible to be true. Then a bump aroused her, and she looked upwards at the side of a vessel.

"I told yer we wouldn't be long," the man said. "The bloomin' lot of lubbers, I've bawled twice. 'Ere, 'old on ter this rope, and I'll shin up the ladder."

"I can't stop in the boat alone," she answered; and before he knew it she had climbed the few steps and drawn herself over the low bulwarks of the *Deliverance*.

And as she did so three men came upon the deck from below, all whispering together, and Stephen Harrington walked first, holding a lantern in his hand. The lantern threw its yellow beams upon her face, and with a shriek of terror he flung his arms in the air and collapsed in a heap upon the ground.

"Grace Stanton!" he shrieked; "take her away!" And he grovelled there with his face hidden in his hands.

With a curse, Brand darted after the lantern and held it with the light right in the girl's eyes; and then, with a drawn smile, he walked back to Harrington and stirred him with the toe of his boot.

"Get up, you fool!" he cried, bending over him, and drawing him up by the collar of his coat, "get up!"

"Grace Stanton," the man muttered, "or her ghost!"

"Ghost be cursed!" Brand cried, impatiently. "It's worse than that. Your daughter Phyllis is on the boat, and we're discovered."

With his supernatural fears dispelled, Harrington, astounded at Brand's words, quickly sprang to his feet; and Phyllis, her determination rising to fever heat now

that the critical moment was at hand, turned and faced them both.

"What is it you want?" Stephen asked roughly. "Why have you come here?"

"To save you from a crime that would lead you to the gallows, to save an innocent man's life, which you and the man beside you have plotted to take," she answered. And then, gaining new courage from her own voice, fiercely continued: "It is useless to attempt deceit and subterfuge. I overheard the whole of your plans to-night. I know the name of the man you have kidnapped and intend to murder. I know it is my fortune that you call yours, and that you are not my father."

There was a faint hiss from Alfred Brand, the only sound that broke the stillness save the lapping of the water and the harsh creaking of the cordage above them.

"Who I am I know not, and care not, now I know I am no daughter of yours," she continued; and Stephen dropped his eyes before the scorn and contempt written on her features. "I have come to save that man's life, and I do not leave the boat unless he comes too."

"And if we set him free, what then?" Brand interjected. "Will you stop any action that you may have taken to-night before you came here—with the police, for instance?"

"There is nothing to stop; no one knows I am here."

Again a quiet smile came over Brand's face, and he turned to Harrington:

"Let the two go together. I'm tired of the whole affair; it's too risky."

"You'll keep quiet about the matter?" Stephen exclaimed in a trembling voice, turning to the girl.

"I shall not bring you to justice; it will be sufficient punishment for you to be always under the thumb of the man who stands beside you.

My birthright and my identity we will talk of to-morrow. Where is your prisoner ? ”

“ Below ; follow me,” Brand answered, and he moved towards the hatchway, pausing for a second at the side of the vessel.

“ Boat below there ! ”

“ Hullo ! ”

“ Get ready to take the lady back, and a sick man. Spread this rug in the bottom of the boat.”

Then he turned to Phyllis again.

“ You’ll have to help me carry him up ; he’s insensible,” he said.

“ Take hold of the rope ; mind how you go. I’ll hold the light above you. Six steps.”

Crash !

With a chuckle he flung over the heavy covering of the hatchway and shot the bolts.

“ Good God ! What have you done ? ” Stephen shouted, catching his arm.

“ Killed two birds with one stone, you addle-brained fool. Did you think I would have all my plans thwarted by a white-faced chit of a girl ? ”

“ But you cannot kill her, too ? How am I to account for her absence ? It’s impossible, I tell you. Let her out.”

“ You’re an idiot ! Don’t interfere ; leave it to me.”

“ I will not have you murder her ! ” Harrington exclaimed. “ I will have her set free ; you hear me ? Open that hatchway and release her, or——”

“ Or what ? ” Brand furiously interrupted ; “ or what ? ”

“ Open the hatchway,” he doggedly repeated, and, stooping down, attempted to shoot back one of the fastenings ; but in a second his companion caught him by the throat.

“ See here, Stephen,” he hissed, as he bent over him. “ Don’t play these games on me. You’re not the master, and don’t attempt to be, if you’ve got any respect for your skin. You know I’m a determined man.

Who’d miss you if you fell overboard, eh ? ”

He left him sitting on the hatchway, and walked across the deck.

“ Boat ahoy ! ”

“ Hullo ! ”

“ The man is too ill to be moved, so the lady will stop. Get yourself a drink. Good-night.”

He stood and watched the boat as it left the ship’s side, and then walked back to where the millionaire sat gazing into vacancy.

“ She must have fainted,” he murmured, “ I can hear no sound.”

“ She’s all right, and won’t trouble any of us again. Why, man alive, you must be mad to think of letting an opportunity like this slip. I don’t want a quarrel with you, but you act like a maniac.”

“ It’s murder.”

“ Never mind what it is. Think yourself lucky that you’ve got some one to do all your dirty work for you. You don’t want to disgorge all your millions, do you ? ”

“ She can prove nothing.”

“ So you say. You don’t know what a woman can do when she starts. I’d sooner fight a dozen men than one of them. Come on, I’m not going to stop here all night. We’ve done nothing except place them on the boat ; and if she’s lost you can live in ease for the rest of your life.”

Brand walked across to Joe Battent, the captain of the boat, who had been a silent observer of the whole scene, and now hung over the bulwarks smoking, and tapped him upon the shoulder.

“ It’s settled ; row us ashore,” he said.

The man gazed into his face, and then took a whiff at his pipe and spat into the water.

“ I didn’t bargain for two passengers,” he said, “ and one a woman. I don’t like the idea of sinking the boat with a young——”

“ Don’t be a cursed hypocrite ! ” Brand exclaimed furiously. “ Don’t beat about the bush ; how much

more do you want? I know it is only a question of price."

"Say another two hundred, Mr. Brand."

"All right, another two hundred. When shall we hear from you?"

"Well, it's no good sinking her too near shore; it will be a few days before we're back."

"Well, call on me when you are, and you'll get the balance. Row us ashore now. Come on, Harrington."

The millionaire rose unsteadily from the hatchway, and rolled more unsteadily towards them, his face white as a sheet and his whole body trembling as though he were smitten with a sudden ague.

"I can't do it, Brand!" he gasped, lurching forward and almost falling into the arms of his companion. "It's too horrible, too terrible."

"It will be a cursed sight more terrible to get swung for doing away with the man; as you will be, if you let her go. Or, perhaps you'd like to set them both free," he jeeringly continued, "and do fifteen years for attempted murder. Get into the boat, you chicken-hearted fool. Get in!" And giving him a push, he shoved him into the boat and sprang in by his side.

Joe Battent and another man were at the oars, and as he left he sang out directions to others who had come on deck to get ready to sail directly he got back.

In silence they rowed to the shore, and in silence Harrington and Brand stood and watched the boat return to the ship. Then a clanking of chains came, borne upon the breeze, the creaking of ropes as the sails were set, and slowly, like a spectral vessel, the *Deliverance* glided down the river towards the sea.

"Isn't that more comforting?" Brand asked, pointing to the fading shadow. "You see, the past is dead, and you are free."

"But what am I to do?" Stephen gasped, moistening his dry lips with his tongue.

"Hum! To-day's Thursday. Come to the club. Write a letter to the Whytes, asking them to take entire care of Phyllis, as you are called to the Cape on urgent business; send the same news home, and clear out by the Saturday boat from Southampton. You'll probably be stopped at Madeira by a cable, saying the girl's missing, and then you can return or go on as you please. Anyhow, we're both safe, and both free."

CHAPTER XIV

DESERTED

PITCH darkness, the scattering dash of the spray against the vessel's side, the creaking of her timbers, the moaning of a man, and the weeping of a woman!

The *Deliverance* was foundering, slowly but surely foundering; swish, swish, sw—eesh came the rush of the water against her, punctuated ever and anon with a thud, as a heavier wave struck her broadside and shook her till she shivered from stem to stern.

Darkness, dense darkness everywhere, and she sank lower, and lunged in the trough of the sea.

Deserted, forsaken, scuttled, and foundering.

The waves broke against her, claiming their certain prey; while the wind whistled through her spars and cordage, and the sea rose higher in her hold.

On she plunged hopelessly, the drenching spray flying over her, the rising water sucking at her sides, her chains rasping and her timbers straining, plunged and rolled, abandoned to her doom. No lights shone from port or starboard, and no glimmer from the masthead pierced the blackness.

Below, in a berth, lying weak and almost senseless, was a man whose ears heard without his mind comprehending the noises that fitted themselves into the weird nightmare that he dreamed—rushing water, creaking timbers, rasping chains, and a woman's cry.

It all became part of his inchoate, uncertain dream, which made him moan in anguish; and the hours went by, and nearer came the end. Then, by-and-by, the drug's effect wore off sufficiently to enable him to sit up in the berth and listen to that sound that came with painful sharpness in a lull of the whistling wind.

It was a woman's cry, a woman in distress. He dragged himself out of the bunk where he had been thrown, and stood, clinging in the darkness to some projection of the woodwork. The boat rolled heavily, and he could scarcely keep his feet; then, while he listened, the cry came clearer still, clearer and more agonizing in entreaty.

"Help, help!" and there was the sound as of hands beating against wooden panels.

Oh, the horror of this accursed darkness! He groped his way across the cabin, and at last found the door leading into a narrow gangway, from the further end of which came—louder now—that piercing wail, "Help, help!"

Where was he? What did this horror mean? He could not remember yet; he only realized, from the noises that assailed his ears, that he was on a boat; why and wherefore he could not understand. He was on a boat in dense darkness, and a woman was crying for help.

Guided by the voice and the beating of hands against the panels, he struggled to where the sound came from. The door of the cabin was lashed fast; and, strive as he would, he could not lessen the knots in the rope there in that utter gloom.

He shouted to her through the

panels, telling her help was at hand; and then returned along the way he had come, searching for a lantern and a knife. He could find neither; and the girl's voice came to him again, in tones of terror, praying for release.

What could he do? His senses were coming back swiftly now, and he climbed up the narrow companion-way to the deck in search of assistance. The slash of the whistling wind beat like a whip across his face, and the stinging spray swept its icy-cold shower over him. He stumbled and fell on the slippery boards, and his outstretched hands touched something lying there—an axe, thank Heaven, an axe!

He gripped it with delight. Little did he know that but a few hours before it had been used to batter the ship's boats to pieces, so that all chance of escape should be cut off.

Still in the darkness, he descended to the cabin again, whence the sobbing cries of the imprisoned girl came to his ears.

"Stand right away from the door," he shouted; "I'm going to break it down!"

He waited an instant, and then swung the axe aloft and brought it down with a heavy thud upon the door. There was a shivering crash, another, and another, and the woodwork broke away in splintering fragments, and through the shattered opening burst forth light.

Light! Thank Heaven, light! It was but the feeble flicker of a lantern left in the cabin; but it was like the hand-grip of a friend after the horror of that long, depressing gloom.

And there before him, crouched at the far end, her hands over her face to ward off any flying splinters of wood, was the woman for whom he had so often imperilled his life, the girl—although he knew it not—for whose sake he swore that undying oath long years ago in South

America, and because of whom he was now a prisoner on this sinking ship.

As he broke down the remainder of the door sufficiently to gain entrance and stepped through, she lifted her hands from her face and gazed at her deliverer.

There, in the dingy cabin, her hair lying loose about her shoulders, her face pale and sorrowful, the beauty of the girl shone forth like a star, and his heart was taken captive.

For a moment neither spoke, and the only sound was the dashing of the water without and the whistling of the wind above them; and then, with reassuring words, he walked towards her and held out both his hands.

"You are safe!" he cried, and with a rush the pent-up feelings of the girl overcame her and she fell forward fainting in his arms.

Tenderly he laid her on a bench and bathed her forehead with water, and as he watched her a strange thought came over him, that they had been together before that night. Where he knew not, perhaps in another life; but somewhere. It was as though he gazed upon the face of a dear friend.

Presently she opened her eyes and looked at him wonderingly. "Where am I?" she asked feebly.

"Safe with a friend," he replied, not knowing what answer to give her.

"And Brand—and—Stephen?" she murmured; "Stephen Harrington."

Then, like the rending of a veil, like the flash of lightning across an ebon sky, he saw things clearly, and his memory brought back sufficient to enable him to fill in the blanks and form the whole.

Brand — Harrington — he recollected now that they called for him, and the three of them drove off together, and then? Ah! then, the chain of memory broke; but circumstances helped him, and he realized that he had

been drugged and carried on this boat.

But when was that? All knowledge of time had gone; it might be yesterday, it might be a week ago, or months, he could not tell; and this girl—who was she?

Brand and Harrington. Yes, where were they? Were they, he wondered, still upon the boat, from which no movement of human life sounded?

Suddenly the girl sat upright and gripped him by the arm.

"They tricked me into descending into the hold in the fore part of the ship, and locked me there," she said. "I remember now I fainted with terror, for I knew they meant to kill me, as they had planned to kill you. We were both to die together. When I recovered consciousness I found myself in this cabin. It was Thursday night when it happened, and this is the second night that has passed. A few hours ago I heard the sound of the waves, the crashing of hatchets above, and then I saw from the port-pole the crew leaving. I cried to them for mercy, but they would not hear me. They have scuttled the boat, so that she must sink, and left us to our death."

"Do you mean this is the work of Stephen Harrington?" he asked in cold passion, forgetting their own danger in the fury within his heart at this man who, vile in the past, had grown viler still with the flight of time.

"The work of him and his friend, a man even worse than he—Alfred Brand."

"Eh, I know them both, and I know why I am here; but you, a woman, a girl——"

"I heard their plans to murder an innocent man, and followed to save you from them."

"Curse them!" he muttered; "there shall be a day of reckoning yet; aye, and a heavy one. But you did not know me; you had never met me."

"I overheard what they intended to do," she answered simply; how, then, could I do nothing to save you?"

He looked at the girl, and a ghastly horror grew up in his mind that turned his heart to ice. Here, in the hour of their deadly peril, alone on the cruel sea, abandoned to the mercy of the rising storm, there was something in her face that again awoke the memories of the past, a likeness to—who was it?—God! he had it now. Grace Stanton! This was Grace Stanton's child. The kid—the youngster. At last he had found her; but how—doomed, it seemed, and waiting for death!

"Come," he said, "let us go on deck."

She placed her hand confidently in his, and they climbed to the open air, where the stinging spray still dashed in drenching showers over the low sunken bulwarks, and the wind howled disconsolately through the shrouds. Carefully screening the lantern, they placed it in a sheltered corner and stepped out together on the wringing deck, over which, in parts, the water swirled and eddied.

On every side was blackness, dark and utter. Overhead thick, inky clouds scudded across the stormy sky, and all around was nothing but the tossing waves.

They fought their way along into the little deck-house, somewhat protected from the wind and spray.

Swish! swish! thud! beat the sea against the boat as he struggled to the rail and held aloft a flare, that burned with a bluish glare, throwing a streak across the white-capped waves. Then it spluttered out into darkness again—darkness more intense by contrast.

Still they waited, their hearts beating with hope, for some answering signal from a passing vessel on that vast waterway; but none came, and ever the sucking water rose upon the deck, and death now stared them in the face.

The man who had given up his life for the sake of the girl, and she for whom this sacrifice had been, stood clasping each other's hands as they clung to the shaking mast and waited, knowing the end was near. He looked into her white face, with her hair streaming like an aureole around it, and all his fear, all his sorrow, was for her alone.

This, then, was Phyllis, the girl he had sworn to save; this beautiful woman was "the kid," and it had only taken fifteen short years to make the change. Fifteen years he had slept. How like her mother she was, too; how like Grace Stanton the last time he saw her, when death was but a footstep from her.

"There is no answer!" she cried.

"No answer," he replied sadly, and in that moment of despair she had no thought of repulsing him as he placed his arm around her and, drawing her head down on his shoulder, tried to shield her from the wind and spray.

CHAPTER XV

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

THE *Deliverance* was sinking fast. Already her bows were thrust deep into the sea, that thirsted to end it all. The water was splashing across her deck and running cold and chilly about the feet of the two who stood there—stood there, gazing into the black void that surrounded them on every hand, hoping that even at the eleventh hour succour might yet come.

They were as helpless as the ship itself. The boats had been smashed. There were no loose planks that could be made into a raft, absolutely nothing; and they could only await the end, the end

that must be very near now, when, with a final lurch, the ship would fill and go down, like a stone, beneath their feet, sucking them with it to death.

They had crouched from the bitter wind in the protection of the little deck-house, and the pale beams from the lantern threw a gleam upon the white, drawn features of the girl, whose lips quivered in a brave effort to keep back her tears.

The man's face was as iron; in this moment of direst peril he was as impassive as a statue of stone, but his eyes were misty with other moisture than the salt sea spray as he looked upon the girl.

"Poor little Kiddie!" he said, as he placed his arm around her and drew her closer to him. "Poor little Kiddie!" And she clung to him as though there could be no danger with him beside her.

The sympathy in his voice opened a new world to her. To have someone speak to her as if she were something to him; to hear a voice that vibrated with tenderness was the dawn of a brighter life to her, who had lived her years in an atmosphere of coldness, her wealth standing between her and those who might have been her friends in the outer world, her intuition causing only loathing in the place of affection for most of those who had moved in her inner life.

She glanced up to him with eyes that glistened, for with death staring her in her face she seemed to be tasting happiness she had never known before.

"Why Kiddie?" she asked presently.

"Does it sound strange to you, or does it seem you have heard the name before?"

"I scarcely know. It seems to me that in some shadowy world we have met before; that to-night is not the first time I have seen you. You do not seem to me as a stranger."

"Nor am I," he answered

quietly. "Years ago, when you were the prettiest little girl in South America, when you were just able to speak my name, then you were 'Kiddie' to all of us. Years ago, in South America, I promised your mother, when she died, I would look after you."

"You knew my mother?" she said in wonderment. "It is the first time in my life I have heard her name."

The wildness of the night—their danger—was as nothing now; they sat in the deck-house forgetful of all things.

He was back in the past, and she striving to learn more of the time when she was surrounded by those who cared for her.

"There were five of us then," he continued, "your father and mother, you and I, and Stephen Harrington. Those were stormy times in Santa Teresa; your father sought to overthrow the Government, and we were with him. He and your mother died, and you were left a sacred charge to me—you and your fortune, for in your dress was concealed the location of the Golden River. You were stolen from me by Stephen Harrington; it is he who has robbed you, he who has trapped you to death, he who has doomed us both because I would have defended you. In the past he was a scoundrel, a cowardly wretch, a traitor to his manhood and his promises, but never such a fiend as he is to-day. His god was money then; his god is money now."

She tightened her grip upon his hand and looked into his face again.

"Forget all that," she cried. "forget Stephen Harrington, and tell me of my own life alone. Tell me of the time when money was not my curse, of the time when my eyes saw my mother, of the days when my lips spoke the word that has been hushed for years. What is money or hate or revenge to us

now, we on the borderland of life and death? Tell me about her; you, the only one who has spoken of her, tell me what she said when she left me to you, tell me if she loved me——"

"Don't cry, Kiddie! it's years and years ago."

"Tell me how she died!" she cried, starting away from him and looking into his face with terror-stricken eyes. "It was not——"

"Not Stephen; no, she died as your father did in the revolution, quietly and peacefully, because she knew I would keep my oath."

Only the thud of the waves and the creaking of the boat disturbed the silence as they sat there together; and then she raised her head and gazed into his eyes again.

"If we are saved; if the dawn brings help——!"

"Yes?"

"I want you to keep your promise to my mother. I do not care about the fortune; I want you to promise to take me away somewhere, away from all of them, and guard me as you said you would."

A dream flashed across the man's mind, a dream that faded as he looked at her, and he put the thought away from him.

"It shall be just as you wish," he answered; "If we are saved. Oh! if the dawn would break——if we could only have light!"

"Light!" a wild thought rushed through his mind that made him start up with a sudden exclamation.

"What is it?" she asked.

"There's still a chance," he answered, "if we dare to take it."

"A chance of life?"

"Yes, a chance, only a chance; but still a chance of life."

"A chance of life," she repeated softly; "and life has grown dear to me."

The light came back to her eyes, and almost a flush to her cheek, as she faced him. She could not understand this new desire for

life, this newborn longing for rescue; and he who had dreamed a dream cast his thoughts behind him again and spoke hurriedly to kill the hopes of what might be if succour came.

"We are sinking fast," he cried; "we may keep afloat half an hour more, we may go down with the next heavy wave. Our only safety is in immediate rescue, our only hope of that is to set fire to the ship."

"Set fire to the ship!"

"Yes; we are most likely in the English Channel, there may be half a dozen vessels within a few miles of us, and rescue should come swiftly. Even at the worst, our fate cannot be harder than it is now. Shall we risk it?"

"Yes, yes," she answered excitedly. "Anything is better than to sit and wait for death, and dawn must be hours hence."

So, in the little sheltered deck-house, with a prayer for help on the lips of both, Ralph opened the lantern, and, while she held it, kindled some splintered wood, which burnt slowly at first; but by and by the fire caught upon the timbers of the ship herself, and leapt and crackled as the wind swept down and fanned it to a blaze.

Up, up, in awful splendour, mounted the wind-swept flames. The straining woodwork snapped with the sound of pistol-shots and cast myriads of sparks around, which fell hissing into the sea. The rolling waves were red—as red as blood—a ship of fire rode on a sea of flame.

There was a mighty crash as the mast went by the board and broke a fiery pathway in the waves, while choking heat and stifling pitchy smoke swept o'er the vessel and drove them backwards, inch by inch, into the deeper water of the sunken bows, and still no help came near.

Nothing came within that spreading circle of light, thrown on the vast curtain of surrounding black-

ness; and the whistling wind swept the flames ever nearer, till they almost scorched their faces.

"The last chance has failed," he said; and, drawing her closer to him, he kissed her upturned lips.

"Hope on," she answered; "hope on."

Boom—oom—om!

"What's that?"

"A syren, we're seen!" he shrieked. "We're seen, and saved."

* * *

The Cape liner *Tuscany*, outward bound, churned her way down Channel, and life and merriment sounded from her saloons.

In the gathering twilight of a grey day she had cleared the wide sweep of Southampton Water, run past the milky cliffs of the Isle of Wight, and with the flashing gleam of The Needles left behind had gone forth into the blackness.

Dinner was over, and from saloon and smoking-room floated the hum of voices and the sound of music.

The steamer's portholes shimmered like a brilliant necklace of pearls, and her port and starboard lights shone forth in the darkness like a ruby and an emerald, throwing their quivering streak of green and crimson on the crested waves.

The beat of her screws, as she thudded onward, mingled with the flow of the water against her sides, the murmur of voices and the sound of music.

England was left behind; here and there upon its rugged coastline twinkled a distant star-like light; but soon these faded too, and nothing but the vast sea rolled around her, and the inky sky spread o'erhead. Six bells sounded, and half the little floating world sought slumber.

Far away to the southward a speck of light grew up out of the blackness.

"Light on the port bow," sang the look-out man, and the eyes of the officers on the bridge turned

towards the speck, which, even while they watched, became larger and told its own story.

"Fire! A ship on fire!" The words spread through the vessel in an instant, and the deck became peopled with an anxious crowd, who watched with straining eyes the beacon as it grew.

"What do you make of her, Mr. Brereton?"

"A trading schooner burnt almost to the water's edge, sir."

"Another point to the south."

The liner dashed the spray in cataracts over her bows as she sprang through the waves on her errand of mercy.

Then a wild, weird, howling sound split the air—a moaning, shrieking cry from the syren—a signal from the liner that aid was near. Again and again the ghastly scream of encouragement rang forth as the *Tuscany*, urged to beyond her standard twenty knots, strained and palpitated as she covered the blackness between her and the growing blaze.

The last shriek of the syren seemed at the very ears of the man and woman who clung to the side of the vessel, waist deep in water; and then into the fiery circle that stretched around came the white outline of the liner's boat.

"Don't come near," Ralph shouted, "or we shall all go down together; she's trembling now. Stand by!"

Taking the girl in his arms, he sprang from the side.

"Take hold!" he gasped; "no more on board!" And as they helped him into the boat the light around them dwindled and faded. The *Deliverance* had disappeared; and the *Tuscany*, her milder lights glowing now the blaze had died, gleamed like a floating palace on the waters.

A man came from his deck cabin upon the liner, and, glancing at the excited crowd, touched one of the officers on the arm.

"What's the matter?" he asked

nervously. "Why have we stopped?"

"A ship on fire, Mr. Harrington. We've sent a boat."

He joined those looking over the side, and gazed towards the flaming ship.

"Two!" a man looking through a glass exclaimed, and then there was a half cry from the crowd as the flames died out.

"In silence they awaited the boat's return, and presently the regular click of oars came borne upon the breeze, and the white shadow of the boat drew nearer.

"Only a man and a woman on board; both saved," sang out a voice, and the passengers found relief in a wild hurrah.

They came into the light thrown by the ship, and the man who had just joined the crowd lurched, and with a gasp fell backwards. It was the ship's doctor who held and supported him. The others were too engrossed in watching the rescued.

"What is it, sir?"

"My heart, over-excitement," he gasped; "help me to my cabin!"

And as he reached it, and sank upon the floor, clang! clang! rang the ship's telegraph, and the *Tuscany* resumed her broken voyage.

CHAPTER XVI

MADEIRA

RALPH CHESLEIGH rolled uneasily in his bunk and opened his eyes.

"How are we feeling?" a cheery voice exclaimed.

"Strong as a horse and as hungry as a hunter!"

"Good sign, very good sign," the doctor answered. "Forty hours' sleep and——"

"Forty hours!" he exclaimed, starting up in amazement.

"Just on; it's two o'clock Monday afternoon."

"It must have been those cursed drugs."

"What drugs?" the man interjected; and Ralph held his arm towards him.

"Injected, eh?"

"Yes. How is Phyllis, the girl who was with me?"

"Going on as well as you are. I'll have her on deck at Madeira."

Ralph sat buried in thought for a moment, and then he turned to the man again.

"I suppose the passengers are dying of curiosity?"

"Absolutely dying. They would all have been in your cabins cross-questioning both of you if I hadn't been careful. You see, it's an unusual romance, a man and woman rescued from a burning vessel and no one else upon it."

"Yes, so it is; but I want your help, doctor, in getting out of telling the yarn at all. I will tell you and the captain; but, for reasons that you will understand when I explain, I don't want it to be the gossip of the boat. How am I to avoid it?"

"Well, there's really no difficulty. You will be leaving at Madeira, I suppose, and if you both keep your cabins until just before you land, you won't have much time for talking at all, and need only tell what you choose."

"Thanks, that will suit me admirably," he answered; and so it came about that Ralph only told the details of his story to the captain and the doctor, as in a sense he felt bound to do; and even then it was only a shadowy tale, in which all names were omitted, and just enough related to enable them to understand that a conspiracy was to be overcome, and that if the news of the rescue became known Ralph's object would be defeated.

Dr. Garnett, the cheery surgeon of the *Tuscany*, had what he brusquely termed "a fair devil of a time." From morning till night

he was bullied, threatened, and stormed at by the indignant Englishmen, who approached him with a bottle of whisky and a box of cigars, and insisted that they should "go and cheer the poor beggar up a bit"; and as a party of men deserted him as an "over-careful, cocky young fool," a bevy of beauty took possession, and begged and pleaded to be allowed to go and talk to the girl, "who must be so lonely."

"After Madeira," was all they got for their pains; and never on any ship that floated was there a man who had to put up with so much talking to and talking at as the unfortunate doctor.

The dinner-table chat resolved itself into merely a series of anecdotes, telling of times when the various passengers were drowned, burnt, and battered, but never kept their beds for more than half an hour; and one pretty little girl used to finish every story with, "the fussy old doctor wasn't born who'd keep her in a stuffy cabin for two days."

"After Madeira," he'd exclaim with a teasing laugh, "you shall talk to them as much as you like then. And," he would add to himself, "as much as you can!"

At five o'clock in the morning the *Tuscan* reached Funchal Bay and dropped anchor off the town, and as she did so Stephen Harrington, with his travelling bag in his hand, came from his cabin.

"We shall sail in about six hours, Mr. Harrington," the second officer remarked.

"Thanks, Mr. Osborne; but I'm not coming back. I shall take a return boat to England. I suffer from an affection of the heart, and find that I have misjudged my strength in attempting a long voyage."

The officer looked at his shaking hands and ghastly face, more death-like than ever in the dawn, and nodded sympathetically.

"You've got over the worst, sir; it's a summer cruise, now."

"I'm afraid the worst is to come," he answered, and then shuddering at the prophetic tones of his words, hailed one of the boats already clustered around the ship, and was rowed to the quay.

At nine o'clock Ralph came upon deck, and found himself the centre of a group of men, who wrung his hands and clapped him on the back all the while showing admiring remarks at him, until he could only laugh and stare around in bewilderment.

"Come into the smoking-room, and we'll celebrate the rescue with champagne," a young fellow exclaimed, pushing him towards the saloon.

"No, really," Ralph answered, smiling at his exuberance; "it's too early."

"Too early be hanged! Young Pestle and Mortar has monopolized you for days, and now you belong to us. Besides, considering you are indebted to me for that extremely becoming drill jacket you are wearing, you might make yourself a little amiable."

It was impossible to resist them, and in five minutes corks were popping, cigars in full swing, and he had constantly to acknowledge a "Good luck, old chap, and thank God you're sitting with us!"

He was amongst a set of good-hearted, honest young Englishmen, who did not ply him with questions; but recognized him as a man of good breeding—one of themselves—and made him welcome accordingly.

Gradually the thought came upon him that he could not steal away and leave them without a word of thanks, and in a lull of the conversation he spoke.

"I'm much obliged to all you fellows for what you've done," he commenced; and a strong murmur of dissent interrupted him.

"I am sorry to leave you, but I shall have to stop at Madeira. I know you'd like to hear all about the fire, but for reasons I'd rather not tell the story. You can guess

why, perhaps. When a young and pretty girl and a man are deserted on a sinking ship, it's not a square deal, and I don't want to talk about it until the score's settled."

There was a nod of assent, and a silence fell upon the group as they looked into Ralph's determined face and pitied the man with whom he had to settle; and then one of them addressed him in a hesitating voice.

"How about funds?" he exclaimed; "perhaps you left hurriedly."

"It's all right, thanks," Ralph answered with a laugh. "I've got sufficient for the moment, and I can cable to my bankers from Madeira."

"Well, here's something you can't get from your bankers," another exclaimed, and thrusting his hand in his pocket he drew out a heavy revolver. "It's loaded in every chamber. Take my advice, keep it on you, and shoot at sight!"

There was a chatter of girlish voices upon the deck, and glancing out he saw Phyllis, radiant and smiling, the centre of an animated group, who obviously were plying her with eager questions.

For a moment he watched her as she shook her head emphatically and laughed at some query that had been put to her, and then he walked out of the saloon; and all discreetly left the two together.

"You must scarcely know me," she said, after the first awkward pause. "Every one has been very good," and she glanced with a smile at the dress which seemed to fit her to perfection.

"We are both in borrowed plumes," he answered laughingly, and then he took her hand and looked into her eyes.

"It's a new life to me to see you well and happy," he said earnestly. "Ever since that night I have had your face in my mind, white and drawn, as you looked when we awaited death together; and now it seems that that must have been

a hideous dream; you are so beautiful!"

She blushed, and cast her eyes down.

"Do my remarks seem too flattering?" he cried with a laugh. "Well, Kiddie, you are beautiful, and why shouldn't I say so? You know I promised your mother to protect you; and I constitute myself a guardian, and shall tell you you're pretty or ugly, good or bad, with the freedom of an elder brother."

The man forced himself to speak so to trample down a thought that would keep springing up in his mind—a thought which he determined must not be allowed to live and grow; he was too old to think of asking her to be his wife. If she consented, he told himself, it would be out of gratitude; if she refused, his oath would be broken, for he would put himself in such a false light that he could not protect her. He decided to assume this position of an elder brother, so that she might understand him from the first.

She turned half away at his words, which seemed to leave them both silent and embarrassed.

Whatever her thoughts were, they swiftly passed, as with a smile she glanced at him again.

"What are our plans now, Ralph?"

"Well, there's nothing to do except stay at Madeira until we can get a return boat."

"Must we go back?" she murmured pleadingly. "Why not forget all that has happened, and begin life from to-day away from England? We are in peace; if we return, there must be more danger and more horror. Let us keep away and be happy."

"It's utterly impossible," he roughly replied, more roughly than he had yet spoken to her; for the temptation again assailed him to take her to some such place as she desired, where they could dream away their lives, where in the lan-

guor and beauty of the semi-tropics she would meet but few besides himself, and perhaps grow to care for him alone.

"Utterly impossible; you talk like a child. Do you think I am going to idle away my time while those thieving scoundrels fritter and squander your fortune?"

"I have told you I do not want it."

"Well, then," he hotly retorted, "do you think I am going to let the attack upon my life, and an attempt to murder you, pass as if both were nothing? If I do not return for your fortune, I return for vengeance. But let us get on shore, and, at least for a time, postpone what yet must come."

The good-byes had been said over and over again, and Ralph and Phyllis stood upon the quay at Funchal watching the *Tuscany* as she steamed out of the bay, swiftly leaving behind her the flotilla of tiny boats and their gesticulating occupants, the diving boys, the fruit vendors, and the thieving Portuguese sellers of souvenirs, who find in the palming off of imitation nicknacks as the real article such a lucrative occupation on the liners, for the unwary purchaser cannot return to-morrow and make trouble. A group in the stern of the boat still waved hats and handkerchiefs, and those on shore responded.

"Good people all, the best in the world," Ralph exclaimed, as he took Phyllis' hand and placed it upon his arm. "What a thing it is to be an Englishman, Kiddie."

"Or an Englishwoman," she answered with a bright smile, and then she stopped and gazed in bewilderment at the look of despair upon his face.

"Whatever is the matter?"

"Nothing," he answered laughing, "and a great deal; we're homeless and penniless. I haven't got a sixpence on me, and nothing upon which I could raise a sovereign."

She laughed, as if the joke were an excellent one; the novelty of being without money seemed to give illimitable grounds for merriment.

"Of course," he continued, "there is really no trouble about it, because we can stay at an hotel, and I can telegraph to London for remittances; but that means doing what I would rather avoid. We should have to explain our position a little; we should have to say we were picked up at sea, and then the news might leak out and give the scoundrels a chance of clearing off before we got back to England."

"Could we pretend we were passengers left behind?" she hazarded.

"Well, scarcely. You, see, passengers left behind don't stand for half an hour waving good-byes to friends on deck, and even then don't usually land without a sixpence between them. I suppose you haven't got a sixpence, by the way?"

"I gave what I had away," she answered, laughing again. "I did not suppose you would take upon yourself the responsibility of looking after me without a shilling in your pocket. But after all, Ralph," she continued, drawing one of the rings from her finger, a circle of diamonds, with a ruby of wonderful colour in the centre, "we need not starve or be homeless. If you sell that, you will get sufficient to carry us to England. If you must go," she added softly.

"Yes, I must go, Kiddie," he said gravely. "Justice is justice, and right is right. I would rather dream through life, you and I alone here, with nothing to think of save our happiness; but it cannot be."

Her head drooped, and a slight blush came upon her cheeks.

"None of that talk, Ralph," the man cried fiercely to himself; "stop it, and be a man!"

CHAPTER XVII

MORE THAN THE WHOLE WORLD

It was four days since Ralph and Phyllis landed in Madeira, and four days such as neither had known before.

Ralph had succeeded in borrowing sufficient upon the ring to amply supply them, and, as he had been able to come to an arrangement whereby it could be regained later, he had not telegraphed to England, preferring to keep all things a dead secret from every one until he was in a position to make a decisive attack on Harrington and Brand.

Four days had passed, every second of which had been fraught with the gravest danger to the man who had sworn, rightly or wrongly, that the girl he adored, the girl who looked to him for everything, must be no wife of his—that what he called honour must overcome his love.

Their cabins had been booked upon the next homeward boat, and at any hour now she might be signalled, and the dangerous time when they were thrown together so much be over.

Ralph sat in the shadow of the palms in the hotel gardens, and waited for her; reviewing in his mind the past few days, thinking of her as she had looked when they had talked together, one time her eyes dancing with merriment, as he spoke of some mad prank of his boyhood, then growing wistful as he told her of the quiet happiness, the children's games, and the contentment of the English ranch when he left it, or, again, soft and misty, when her thoughts went back unbidden to the tragedy of Santa Teresa—the death of her mother.

He seemed to be fighting a battle with himself.

"Thank God, it's nearly over," he muttered presently. "I couldn't stand it much longer!" And then he started up from his chair. "Why should it not be so?" he argued.

"I love her with all my heart, and she's fond of me. Why not?"

He shook his head. "Stop it, Ralph, old chap. Don't get the bit in your mouth and bolt. You're over thirty, and she's under twenty. Five years hence she might discover it was only gratitude, and eat her heart out because she'd found out what love meant; and you wouldn't like to think that Grace Stanton was near you then, would you? It's nearly over now. Have a cigar and don't be a fool."

"Yes, that's all strong common-sense," he continued to himself; "and the best advice is at the end. Have a cigar, and don't be a fool."

He drew a cigar from his case, lighted it, and sat down again; and then, as he heard a step, he threw the cigar upon the ground and glanced in admiration at the girl, who, with the flush of health upon her face and happiness lighting up her eyes, looked down upon him.

"You are an incarnation of youth and spring time," he said as she stood before him, and his own eyes sparkling as he gazed in hers.

"And you?"

"I," he answered; "well, I'm a kind of late summer or early autumn."

She smiled a little, and then, closing her sunshade, sat down beside him.

"I wish you wouldn't talk such nonsense, Ralph," she remarked; "one would think you were an old man."

"I am comparatively; when you were four I was eighteen."

"And now I'm nineteen, and you're thirty-three, a very nice age for a man. And you don't look thirty."

"That's what a woman calls a compliment, isn't it?"

"I don't know," she answered, with just a little pettishness in her tone. "It's absurd for you always to be talking as you do; and just light another cigar. Why you wanted to throw that one away

directly you saw me I don't know."

"Kiddie got up in a bad temper."

"Kiddie did nothing of the kind, and you're always talking about being to me as a brother, and treating me—well, different from my knowledge of brothers, any way. Really, as if I ought to be in a glass case."

"I'm sorry if I've vexed you—"

"Oh, you haven't," she quickly interrupted. "You haven't really, Ralph; you've been kinder to me than any one I ever knew; you're more to me than any one in all the world. I suppose you're right. I got up in a bad temper."

"Then I'll light a cigar, and we'll stroll to Nossa Senhora do Monte, and forget all about it. It's the last time. I expect the boat will be in to-day."

"Yes, it's the last time," she answered softly, and in silence they walked on together. Nothing seemed sufficient to arouse conversation to life. The pauses were long, their remarks merest question and answer.

"Don't keep staring at me, Ralph," she exclaimed at last, and he awakened to the knowledge that, with his thoughts far away, his eyes had been fixed upon her, watching the play of the light breeze amongst her curls, thinking her the fairest woman he had ever seen.

They had reached a secluded nook under trellised vines, and sat down again together.

"When we get to England, when you have won back my fortune which I don't want, what are you going to do?" she asked impatiently.

"Your contempt for money is a sign of your extreme youth," he responded teasingly.

Her ear was very near his hand as it rested on the back of the stone seat, and he pinched it playfully. The man felt very safe now, because it seemed to him she was in a childish bad temper, and could be talked to as a child.

"I didn't ask you to be ridiculous, or even sarcastic," she said, jerking her head away. "I want to know what you propose to do."

"I shall go back to South America."

"And your plans for me?"

"Well, I don't exactly know," he answered with mock gravity; "but I think I shall look for a very good fellow with a very strong will, and marry you to him."

The laughter died from his voice as he gazed in her face and saw the colour fade from it and her cheeks turn pale, while her deep eyes flashed with something that looked like passion.

"Why, Kiddie! what is it?" he cried, catching her arm. "I was only joking."

"Don't touch me!" she answered, dragging herself from him. "Have you no respect for me at all? You may well consider yourself my guardian, for you seem to think you possess me altogether to do what you will—"

"Don't be silly, Kiddie—"

"You will pick out some one to marry me!" she cried in scorn. "You will find some one and say, 'Here is your husband,' and then back to South America, back to your old life, and forget I ever lived. You're tired of me; I've become a burden to you. You're thinking now of how you can settle things and get back and say, 'I've kept my oath!'"

She choked back her tears, and before he could speak went on again quickly—

"And I'm tired of you. I loath the eternal cry of brother, brother, brother, and your promise of the past. You do it all because you made that promise; not because you care for me. I'm tired of the falseness of it, tired of you, tired of myself and life!" And she flung her head down, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Whatever has come over you, Kiddie?" he said gently, taking her two hands in his. "Where on

earth have you got these strange fancies from? Don't you know that, excepting my few friends in South America, you're all I've got in the world? You're a baby in your thoughts, or you'd understand a little more why I love you more than the whole world together."

She raised her head, and her eyes began to sparkle behind her tears.

"You think because I was a baby years ago I'm a baby now," she said, and looked into his face.

"Is it true, Kiddie?" he asked in wonderment.

"Yes, it's true, dear," she answered; "you, too, are all the world to me!" And then, after a pause, "I am so glad I got up in a bad temper!"

"What a blessing to the world a bad temper is!" he said with a wealth of appreciation. "If you hadn't been bad-tempered——"

"You'd have kept on that brother talk until I should have gone mad," she laughed. "But now I suppose it really is done with?"

"Absolutely," he replied, and together they retraced their steps, over that same road where conversation had languished so terribly, towards the quay.

* * * *

The expected boat had arrived, and as they came upon the jetty, they saw her entering the harbour.

"A good omen," Ralph cried, pointing to the vessel. "In a few days we shall be back in England; a few weeks and justice will be done, and we can begin our new life together."

There was a shade of hesitation upon her face, and she touched his arm.

"Don't say it," he answered, in response to her look. "I know you are going to ask again that we should forget the past and let them go free; but it cannot be. Your father risked his life and spent years of labour locating the River of Gold, a river whose bed is studded

with nuggets washed down from the heights; and he did it for you, not for a pair of scoundrels to fatten on his wealth. It was for you, and you must have it. With it they have done nothing but ill, with it you can do nothing but good; and you must and you shall regain it. To their thieving and knavery they have added murder, and as they have sown, so they shall reap."

"It is all true what you say," she answered; "but, Ralph, give way to my thoughts, my presentiments. A voice seems to tell me to rest content. You are not a poor man, and I have your love and all the happiness the world can offer. Let us be contented so, for I dread the stepping backwards to the past. I know it means trouble and disaster for us both. Give way to me in this, the first thing I have asked you since you gave me the right to ask so much."

The man stood silent, watching the liner as she cast anchor in the bay, and his wishes were struggling one against the other. It was hard to have to refuse her the first thing she asked; it was harder still to let those two men go unpunished. She, reading his thoughts, helped him.

"Good could be done with so much money, Ralph," she said; "you are right there. Let us agree upon this day to forego vengeance; and when we get to England force them to give up the money, and then let them go free."

The man still stood irresolute. It offended his strong sense of right that those who had lifted their hands against her should escape; but a glance into her eyes decided him.

"This is the happiest day of my life," he answered; "let it be as you say. We leave Madeira not with thoughts of vengeance, only justice—mild justice, too, for such as they; but for your sake it shall be so."

It was towards late afternoon when they went on board the

steamer and stood upon the deck looking back upon the little town where so much had happened—where their lives had been so changed.

"You look pale and tired, Kid-die," Ralph said tenderly.

"I always have a bad headache after losing my temper," she murmured demurely.

"Well, rest until dinner time," he said, and walked with her towards the saloon. "Good-bye, dear," he whispered.

"Why did you say that?" she cried. "It sounds unlucky."

"That's some of the South American superstition coming out," he laughed. "You don't think I shall disappear from the boat, do you? But if you like it better, *au revoir*." And with a bright smile he left her and walked away.

"Ralph Chesleigh, by all that's wonderful!"

He felt a slap on the back, there was a sound like the discharge of a miniature firearm, and he found himself in the grasp of a man with whom he had been in close companionship in Santa Teresa years before.

"Just come aboard, eh?"

"Just; we're fellow passengers to Plymouth," Ralph responded heartily, for he had an honest liking for the man.

"Then we'll yarn about old times by hours at a stretch. By the way, I owe you something: close upon five thousand."

"What on earth for?"

"That bit of land in Reos we owned between us. The railway bought it for just on ten. I've written to you about it."

"Good; but where on earth have you come from—the Cape? Stop half a minute, can you lend me fifty now?"

"Of course I can."

"Then let's have it sharp, and I'll explain later."

Ralph, aglow with excitement, called over the side to one of the many boats that circled round the

ship, and, taking the notes which his friend handed to him, dashed down the steps and sprang into the stern.

"Many thanks," he shouted in reply to the amazed look of this friend. "Back in half an hour."

"Forgot to pay your hotel bill, eh," the man on deck suggested with a grin; and Ralph waved his hand vigorously in reply as the boat shot away.

An idea had occurred to him which made him chuckle to think of. To-morrow, when he and Phyllis were strolling on the deck, he would suddenly surprise and please her by giving her the ring which she had left behind in Madeira. Then he fell to thinking of the ring that he would be buying for her in England, and in sheer exuberance of spirits paid the avaricious Portuguese sufficient to satisfy even him absolutely.

In a bullock carro, which travelled so leisurely over the ascending roadway that it almost drove him mad with irritation, Ralph made his way to where he had left the ring; and securing the jewel, tied it for safety into the corner of his handkerchief.

"Back to the quay," he cried, and sank upon the cushions, full of dreams of the future, full of anticipation of the surprised look of pleasure that his little pleasantries would awaken, and with no thought of the evil which was yet to make that day, of such brilliant opening, the blackest they had known.

CHAPTER XVIII

"I SHOOT AT SIGHT"

A DROWSY, dancing heat was over everything as Ralph's bullock carro slid smoothly on its polished steel runners over the equally polished cobbles of Funchal towards the

quay. The blue bay rippled in the sunlight, the lemon scent of the magnolia grandiflora hung heavy in the air, mingling with the thousand and one other odours that floated from the gardens of the white-walled quintas nestling amongst the hills, luxurious with their tangled masses of heliotrope, wistaria, roses, and mimosa.

Down through the tree-lined *Entrada da Cidade*, towards the landing-stage, with its stalls of basket-work, its pedlars of embroidery, its fruit booths of loquats and bananas, they passed; the jingling of the bells round the necks of the oxen making a pleasing melody in the ears of the man who lounged back on the cushions behind the half-drawn curtains, glad that at last the time had come when they—it was they now—when Phyllis and he could return to England.

He glanced out at the view before him. There in the embrace of the curving bay, bringing gladness to his heart, lay the vessel that was to bear them back home together; while away on the distant horizon, the shifting shadows of the fleecy clouds ever changing the hues upon them, the rugged *Desertas Rocks* completed the beauty of the scene, rising like enchanted islets of purple out of a sea of sapphire.

The carro drew up by the little jetty, where a hammock or two carried by muscular Portuguese, from which dark eyes flashed, flitted by, and where the pink and grey African parrots, awaiting purchasers, screamed and whistled shrilly.

Ralph slipped out and gazed back at Funchal. Away up amongst the palms and orange groves was the *Quinta da Bella Vista*. He could just see the trellised balcony, with its profusion of scarlet trumpet flowers and mauve bougainvillæa, where of an evening he had sat with Phyllis, recalling all the past that was worth recalling, and building

airy castles for the future, that lived but as long as the sunset glow upon the western hills.

But that was over now; she understood him, and they were both happy and returning to England. He walked towards the steps where the little boats with their shady awnings rocked gently to and fro.

The lazy oxen stood silent and sleepy by the carros, a group of Arab steeds tossed their proud heads or switched their graceful tails at the irritating flies, and the grey parrots in their tin cages still fluttered their wings and scolded noisily.

Then came the clatter of hoofs as a man rode by the other end of the avenue of trees, whose speckled shadows, where the sunlight filtered through the leaves, made a golden mosaic on the pavement.

Ralph looked round; and then a sudden spasm seemed to seize upon him and to transform his pleasant smiling face into that of a man whose heart was bursting with the lust of hate.

For one single instant he stood as though rooted to the spot, his hands twitching and his eyes dilated with surprise and wonder.

Then madly he sprang forward, dashed wildly towards the lounging Portuguese who stood beside his horses, and, hiring one of them, sprang upon its back, gathered up the reins, and rode rapidly away after the other horseman.

"Surely it cannot be he," he muttered. "Some strange resemblance. It cannot be he; but if it is, then this is the hand of Fate."

He followed swiftly the route taken by the other man, the favourite ride in Funchal, down the broad *Caminho Novo* towards the quaint fishing village of *Cama de Lobos*.

Unconscious of pursuit, the foremost rider cantered on at an easy pace; but presently there broke upon his ears the clattering dash

of a horse ridden at a gallop behind him, its hoofs striking fire from the smooth round stones.

He turned and looked back, and a ghastly terror blanched his features and sent a cold chill down his spine. With a gasp he brought his whip down on the horse's neck, and the high-spirited animal flew forward like an arrow from a bow.

"Delivered into my hands at last!" cried Ralph fiercely, as he raced after him. "At last!" And he ground his teeth in a white-hot rage. While gripping the bridle tightly in his left hand, his right went behind him to his hip pocket, and then something bright flashed and glistened in the sunshine. How he blessed the man who made him take it, and remembered his advice.

"At last! I shoot at sight!"

All thought of the boat lying there in the harbour, and the girl awaiting his return, seemed to have vanished from his mind. Everything was now absorbed in the wild thirst for vengeance that had come upon him. He did not ask himself why, at the last moment, Fate had delivered this man into his hands; he did not even marvel at finding him upon the island. All was dominated by the thirst for vengeance; and urging the horse onward he sped swiftly after the rider who fled before him—the man he loathed, the man he meant to kill—Stephen Harrington.

Stephen Harrington, who had believed himself secure in the solitude of Madeira, and that Ralph and Phyllis were still on board the *Tuscany*, sailing towards the Cape, realized that death was near him now, and shivered in the sunlight as he rode.

The recollection of the past in Santa Teresa flashed like a vision before his eyes, and he recalled the last time that he dashed wildly onward when bullets whistled by and Zanechez's troopers chased him like the wind. Then he rode side by side with Ralph; but now a

change had come about, and Ralph pursued him, and would have no mercy. A clammy sweat broke out upon his face, his lips grew dry, his tongue clave to his mouth, as the horse he rode plunged wildly forward under his repeated blows.

Unconscious of the road he took, he turned the animal's head inland, and dashed upward over the rough open country that rose swelling before him, towards the sloping hills beyond.

"Ping!—whiz!—ping!" rang out the first shots from Ralph's revolver, and whistled by Harrington's ears in a way that froze his blood.

Remembering the ways of South America, he bent low over the horse's neck and managed to draw his own weapon; and as he swerved past a boulder in the path he swung round in the saddle, and fired twice in succession at his pursuer.

With a swishing whirr the bullets sang through the air, but both missed. Ralph fired again, and yet again; but the speed at which the men were riding rendered the aim unsteady, again the lead was wasted, and still the chase went on.

Progress was slower now; the road rose steeply towards the Grand Curral, that mighty chasm cleft through the heart of the volcanic rocks, where but a narrow ledge was rideable.

Once or twice, as a chance seemed favourable—where the roadway curved, or a projecting crag intervened—another messenger of death whistled forth from either man's revolver; but not even the horses had been hit; and now, with all their ammunition spent, the broiling sun beating down upon them, the wild flight and the stern pursuit continued.

Neither man called to the other, and the only sound that broke the silence was the clash of the horses' hoofs against the stones, mingling with an occasional oath from Harrington, or a fierce, exultant cry from Ralph,

Stephen's horse was wearying a little now; and he swore fiercely at it in his terror, and flogged it with his whip.

On, on they thudded, still over rising ground, on through country more wild and desolate, the rocks more jagged and the path more dangerous.

Harrington dashed blindly forward on the narrow road which wound in long curves round the mountain-side, overhanging the ravine.

Up above them, on the left as they rode, rose the towering peaks of barren rock, without a break, without a chance of foot-hold, sheer as a wall to the blue sky overhead; while on the right there dropped clear from the crumbling pathway's edge a yawning precipice, thousands of feet unbroken.

The path itself was scarcely a yard in width, room for only a single horseman to ride, no means of passing, and a false step meant death—a sudden plunging downward through giddy space to nothingness.

Along the narrow ledge of rock they thundered, never for an instant checking speed, pursuer or pursued.

On and on. A frenzy possessed Harrington, a wild and reckless courage of despair. In cold blood his cowardly soul would have shrunk from the danger; but now he knew that this was his only chance—this awful pathway over the abyss. Fleet-footed vengeance gained upon him now; and if Ralph reached him, then his hour was come.

On, ever onward, till the shelf of rock grew narrower still, and seemed as though it ended. Instinctively he reined in his horse a little, for it looked like leaping over the edge to certain doom. Just ahead a clump of sturdy saplings grew out from a cleft in the face of the wall, and he would need to stoop low as he passed to avoid being dashed from his saddle to the depths below.

Then suddenly a wild hope shot across his brain; for beyond the trees he saw the pathway widened out again—widened to a little plot of greensward, where one could turn a horse. Cautiously he passed the point of danger and galloped fiercely to the patch of turf, then, tugging vigorously at the bridle wheeled the horse round, and rode back like a whirlwind to meet Ralph. His spurs were sunk deep in the horse's flanks, his whip was showering blows about its head, and, as it reared and plunged, a shriek of triumph burst from Stephen's lips.

Ralph, now upon the narrowest ledge of all, strove furiously to check his foaming steed, for a swift glance had shown him Stephen Harrington's manœuvre. The man had turned his horse, and now rode back at break-neck speed towards him; then, even as he looked, Stephen took his chance, rose upright in his stirrups, flung his feet free, and made a mighty spring towards the overhanging clump of bushes jutting from the rock.

His fingers clutched a branch that swayed and creaked beneath his weight, and seemed about to snap as he swung to and fro; but with tremendous effort he drew himself up safely, and clinging there—a bitter smile of triumph breaking around his callous mouth—he waited for the end his strategy had planned.

The frightened horse, released from Stephen's weight, dashed onwards again, rushing towards Ralph, who saw with horror the certainty of death.

A second more, and with a thud the horses met. A plunging, rearing mass fought for an instant on that dizzy verge. A ringing clash of hoofs, a cry from Ralph, and then all three went over.

CHAPTER XIX

HOMEWARD BOUND

THE path was empty.

Below, in the thick tropical growth fringing the sides of the ravine, lay an inert heap—two maimed and bleeding horses and an unconscious man. And above, still clinging to the refuge he had found, was Stephen Harrington, his miserable heart fluttering at the chance of life.

Presently he clambered carefully down on the narrow ledge, and creeping near the edge, gazed over; but only for an instant. He drew his hand across his eyes to stay the dizziness that tempted him to fall, and, staggering back, stood close against the rocky wall and listened, straining his ears for any sound from below. But none came, and the droning buzz of insects and the quivering leaves of the trees above his head alone broke the stillness.

"He must be dead," he muttered through his teeth; and the oppressing air seemed to repeat with its hot breath the words, "He must be dead."

He dared not look again to satisfy his hopes, a terror seemed to paralyse his limbs, his legs shook under him; and he sank down and crawled on hands and knees along the narrow ledge towards the broader pathway.

He paused again and listened. No sound from below, only the buzzing of insects, only the solitude of death!

He rose to his feet and struggled on. A hundred yards ahead something lay white upon the ground, and, picking up a handkerchief of Ralph's he thrust it into his pocket and then continued the descending route towards the town. Slowly he toiled along the road over which but a short while ago he sped so swiftly, and came back into Funchal as the evening light fell ruddy on the hill sides, and the sinking sun bathed the Desertas in a glow of crimson.

The hum of life, now the day's heat was past, sounded in every street, from every quinta; the brown-skinned children romped upon the quay, the laden boats danced on the violet waves, and from the liner lying in the bay sounded the warning whistle of departure.

Aboard the vessel Phyllis lay sleeping, and a happy smile hovered around her lips, as though some pleasant dream was soothing her—as so, in truth, it was. A joyous vision of the future in England, not in the noisy rush and tiring social whirl that she had known, but a quiet and peaceful life with Ralph, away from all that in the past had wearied with its hollowness.

One idea now bounded the whole horizon of her being—a home of her own, with Ralph ever beside her. She stirred slightly in her sleep and whispered his name, whispered softly, "Ralph." But he was far away upon the rocky mountain-ridge, in hot pursuit of Stephen Harrington.

Through the long afternoon the girl slept on; the drowsy heat, the excitement of the day, the gentle ripple of the placid sea, all soothing her to slumber.

The sunset faded swiftly, the last rays died from far Ponta do Sol, and sudden darkness came.

Then, as the shadows fell among the pines, and the lights of Funchal shone forth like glow-worms in the distance, the churning screws threw up the white foam in the vessel's wake, shaping her course for England.

The stir of departure roused the girl, and with a sigh, perhaps at the ending of her happy dream, she rose and went on deck to look for Ralph. Awoke from a dream to stern reality!

She walked the promenade deck from end to end, but failed to find him, and for an instant felt a little hurt. She thought he would have been expecting her—waiting for

some sheltered corner, with a cosy chair piled up with rugs and cushions ready for her comfort.

And as she stood gazing anxiously about her, the freshening breeze blowing through her truant curls, one of the officers walked past, one who had been on deck when she and Ralph came aboard together.

He paused, and, raising his cap, glanced towards her.

"You are seeking some one," he said. "Can I be of any service?"

"Thank you," she answered; "I was looking for Mr. Chesleigh, the gentleman I came aboard with."

"He returned to Funchal."

"Returned?"

"Yes."

"But he, too, was coming to England!"

"I am sorry," he said, "but I fear he has been left behind. I thought he was only a visitor who had come to see you safely on board, for he took a boat and went back almost directly. "Still," he continued, and he saw the distressed look growing in her face, "I may be mistaken; I will make inquiries."

"Thank you," she murmured, as he walked away; and she turned and, resting her hand upon the rail, gazed back towards the receding shores of Madeira. The fear began to awaken in her heart that his words might be true, or surely Ralph would have been on deck awaiting her. But then, why should he return to Funchal? By and by the officer came back, and a glance at his face confirmed her suspicions.

"I am sorry to say that it is true," he said. "The gentleman has missed the boat, and has been left behind at Funchal."

She did not answer; the rush of disappointment was so keen that she could not realize it. The voyage which she had hoped would be so happy would now be spoilt, and she would be miserable, thrown amongst a crowd of strangers.

"You will be very comfortable

on board," the officer tritely added; "and the trip is only a short one."

"Yes, thank you," said Phyllis.

"No doubt you will find a cable for you at Plymouth," he hazarded, at loss what else to say.

"No doubt," she answered slowly. "How soon is there another boat from Madeira?"

"There is another liner in a week; but smaller vessels frequently put in."

"I could telegraph from England before another boat left Funchal."

"Very probably," he answered; "but you are sure to find a cable awaiting you." And, raising his cap again, he left her; while she walked to her own cabin, and sat wondering what she should do when they arrived at Plymouth.

No doubt Ralph would telegraph to her, telling her what to do until he arrived by the next vessel. But she wished he was there with her. Perhaps some accident had happened to him, he might be unable to send to her; and then, cast adrift upon the world, what could she do? The dinner-bugle sounded, but she took no heed of it, and by and by went up on the deck again, now quite deserted.

Her solitariness pressed heavily upon her; she felt alone in the world. There was no one now who cared for her but Ralph; and she choked down the little sob that rose in her throat as she walked to the stern of the boat and gazed back at the streak of silver that the vessel's track left behind under the soft rays of the newly risen moon.

The rushing water seemed to fascinate her as the ship sped onward, and the phosphorescent spray broke into showers of molten light against the vessel's sides. The thudding screws seemed to beat in unison with her thoughts, repeating over and over again the one word, "Ralph."

Then, as she stood there in the stern alone, a figure came from behind the shadow of the deck

smoking-room out into the patch of moonlight, and she turned and faced the man of all others she most feared to meet—Stephen Harrington.

He recognized her, and a muttered oath burst from his lips.

For an instant the two stood motionless, and neither spoke; and then the girl edged close towards him, and looked with unflinching eyes straight into his white face.

"You?" she cried.

"Yes, I!" he answered, with an attempt at jauntiness that sat but ill upon his ashen features.

"You!" she repeated, taking her courage into both her hands. "You, whom I last saw in London; you who tried to murder me upon the boat, to murder Ralph!"

"S—sh!" he cried, glancing round in apprehension.

"Where is he?" she suddenly demanded, coming yet closer to him.

"Who?"

The man who was in Madeira—the man who should be on this boat—the man—my God!—I see it now, the man you've murdered—Ralph!"

"Be quiet!" he cried, seizing her roughly by the wrist. "Be quiet, do you hear? Do you want a scene upon the ship?"

"I want justice," she answered, "and justice I will have. There is a heavy reckoning against you already, and time will prove if the total is not heavier still. Where is he?" she repeated wildly; "tell me; where is he? Where is Ralph?"

The man looked at her excited face and dilated eyes, and realized the danger of his position. Realized that, rushing blindly from the murder of Ralph Chesleigh, he had run into the very evil that he had tried to avoid. Of what use was his subterfuge in giving a false name when he came on board? What use anything he did without the directing brain of Alfred Brand to point the course to take?

After a moment's pause she went on. "We would have forgiven you—Ralph and I—for the attempt upon our lives; but now"—and her eyes blazed with passion—"now there is a greater debt to pay. You have killed the man I love, and now I throw all compassion to the winds, all thought of mercy, and as I hate you, Stephen Harrington, so will I bring punishment upon you!"

She had stirred herself into a frenzy of excitement, and her voice rose higher as she denounced the man who stood before her. No longer a girl, the woman's heart in her bosom was beating with a courage that surprised herself as she poured forth a torrent of accusation against him.

They still had the deck to themselves. Below in the saloon the passengers idled over dinner; the light from the entrance cut a bright beam across the darkness, while on the bridge there could just be discerned the figures of the officers silhouetted against the sky.

The man seemed chained to the spot; and, as he nervously watched the girl, the thought grew up in his mind that her death was needful too. It was anything for his own safety now—anything for his own neck.

No one was stirring; no one could see. He gazed over at the white mass of foam swirling behind the vessel, in which one would be lost to sight in an instant. Then he looked back into her face. The excitement and vehemence had left her overcome, and she stood resting against the rail. Without a word, he caught her firmly round the waist and strove to lift her from her feet and hurl her overboard.

"Curse you!" he muttered. "I'll get rid of you as I've got rid of him. Your lover's lying dead in Madeira. I killed him, as I'm going to kill you now!"

With a frenzy of despair the girl clung to the rails, while he beat at her fingers and strove to throw her over.

CHAPTER XX

PHYLLIS AWAKENS

"Help! help!" she shrieked. And then with a piercing scream her senses left her; her overwrought nerves gave way, her hold relaxed, and she fell back fainting in his arms.

Now was his chance; but it had come too late, for as he lifted her the tramp of feet sounded upon the deck, and a crowd of passengers sprang seemingly from nowhere and made with one accord towards the stern, whence the cries had come.

There, in the little patch of moonlight, he stood, holding the fainting woman in his arms, and a confused medley of voices assailed him with questions for which he must find an answer; and now, too, he must rely upon himself alone, upon some quickly invented plausible lie. And for once his sluggish brain proved equal to the task.

"What is the matter?" authoritatively demanded the officer who had spoken to the girl not an hour ago.

"Attempted suicide," answered Harrington quietly. "I was only just in time to save her; another second and she would have been overboard."

Then a voice in the crowd whispered something about some one left behind in Madeira and the solitude of the girl, without a friend on that great ship, backing up with seeming truth Harrington's easy lie.

Through the little knot that gathered round, the ship's doctor came and knelt down beside the girl, and an instant later he gave the order that she should be taken below at once, waited while his instructions were obeyed, and then followed to her cabin; while the passengers broke up into little chatting groups, and spent the evening according to their liking, almost forgetful of the momentary sensation which had ruffled the calm routine of their homeward voyage.

STEPHEN HARRINGTON passed a night that was simply torture. It seemed to him that the beginning of the end had come—ruin, disgrace, and perhaps something else, if they could prove the Madeira affair against him.

But the Devil helped his own again. Every danger, for the moment at least, was averted. The news was all over the ship next morning. The mysterious lady passenger had not recovered from her faint; or even if she had, it was to lapse into a condition which was worse. The doctor reported her delirious and a sufferer from a severe attack of brain fever.

And so it was. Phyllis Stanton lay back in her berth, her hair tumbled in masses around her white face, and moaned and talked of Ralph and Madeira; now and again living once more the terror of the burning vessel, or shrieking with fright as she cried that someone was trying to kill her, and Ralph was lying dead.

And the name of Harrington was so intermingled in that wild talk that the millionaire felt that he had done the cleverest thing in his life in assuming another name when he boarded the vessel.

For a little while the attention of the passengers was concentrated upon the girl and her romantic position; but then came the Bay of Biscay in one of its worst humours, the English Channel as sullen and surly as it had ever been, and all, save one man, practically forgot her existence.

If she would only die, and so settle everything, his thoughts always ran; but the voyage drew to an end, and the reports were always the same—she was no better and no worse.

The Eddystone was tipping the grey horizon before he had decided what he could do; and then, in a

few moments' conversation with the ship's doctor, he arranged the matter, and left him, chuckling.

He was a patron of many hospitals and nursing homes in London, he told the man, and if there were no message for the girl, he proposed that she should stay upon the boat until Blackwall was reached, and he would have her sent for and nursed until her reason was restored. And so it was agreed. Stephen Harrington left the boat at Plymouth, and sending a peremptory telegram to Brand, took the mail for Paddington.

They walked through the streets together, and Alfred Brand's face grew a shade paler as he heard of the rescue from the burning ship. He settled the thing in his own mind at once; bleed Harrington for all he could, and clear out. But he grew more cheerful as the story progressed.

"Sure he is dead?" he queried eagerly, as his companion told of the chase in Madeira.

"Must be, the drop was terrific."

"I don't like the doubt; you should have climbed down and shot him."

Stephen shuddered as he saw that precipice in his mind's eye, and rapidly continued the story, finished it, and paused for Brand's advice.

"You are to have her fetched, then, and send her to a hospital?"

Stephen nodded and placed his hand upon his companion's arm.

"She needn't go to a home at all! It simply came as an inspiration," he whispered. "You must know some people who would look after her; people who, perhaps, are ignorant of nursing, and might do the wrong thing."

"Ah!"

"Yes, I once heard of a man dying, because a piece of ice was placed above his heart for five minutes. It was the wrong thing to do, but no one knew that it had been done."

Alfred Brand walked on in

silence; but in his cunning face could be seen the working of his mind. Now and again he shook his head, as he rejected some villainous scheme that his brain had wrought, and then suddenly his eyebrows shot up and a smile thinned down his callous lips.

"Splendid!" he ejaculated; "it's absolutely the best idea I've ever had in my life. Simply perfect!"

"What is it?"

"Well, anyhow, she must be taken to your house."

"To my house?" he cried aghast. "Why not do as I suggest?"

"Don't be a fool," Brand answered impatiently. "Can't you see that if you go home without her you'll have to announce her as missing? You'd have to be mad with anxiety, offer thousands of pounds for her recovery, give a full description of her, and by those means probably go and put some of the passengers of one of the boats on the scent. Do you want to see columns in the newspapers headed: 'Millionaire's daughter still missing!'—when all the while some of your careless friends are slowly killing her? Why, they'd understand the game at once, and blackmail you for the rest of your life!"

"But with trained nurses around her and the best medical attention," Harrington stammered, "we couldn't—she might not die!"

"And she shan't die, if London physicians can save her!" Brand responded boisterously, slapping his companion on the back. "In three months you shall see her as well as ever she was."

The millionaire paused and gazed, with his mouth open, at his companion.

"I'm not going to explain," Brand exclaimed. "You leave the whole thing to me. I've never failed you yet, and I never shall. I'm going to show you the finest bit of comedy you've ever seen in your life. We've had

enough of tragedy, and we'll turn over a new leaf and be as kind to the girl as if we were a pair of twin fathers to her." And the man laughed—a nasty laugh it was, too—at his own witticism. "Now, you keep yourself out of sight until to-morrow, when you will meet Judith and myself with the girl. Judith is a most invaluable woman in these emergencies, Stephen. I hope you'll remember her. She's only a cousin of mine; but blood's thicker than water, you know. I want to see her independent."

The millionaire nodded moodily. To a man who held money as his god, the reminder of how that money must be sucked away from him was unpleasant.

But Alfred Brand held the whip hand. He was utterly indispensable to the millionaire; and so the latter put up at a quiet hotel to await his instructions, while Brand proceeded to Mayfair to explain the position to Judith.

"I always have regarded you as having a fair amount of brains," he said to the woman, when he had told her as much of the state of affairs as he deemed advisable.

"Can you carry it out?"

She nodded her head, and her hand opened and closed as though she were grasping the money she expected to be paid.

"Well, you understand. In a week the whole of the present servants of the house must have gone, and new ones be in their places."

"If Mr. Harrington appoints me in full charge of the household, they'll leave in a body," she answered. "They hate me."

"Very well, Judith, I appoint you in Mr. Harrington's name. To-morrow you will go to the docks at Blackwall, and fetch her from the boat. The more you look like a nurse the better. You know Finsbury Square, in the City; it's a quiet neighbourhood. Drive through there as soon after twelve as you can, and Stephen and I will join you."

"And the price?"

Brand held up his hand, and moved his thumb to and fro.

"Stephen is under that," he said quietly; "and if you're in this scheme he's equally under yours. You can arrange your own price, Judith; we can squeeze him dry, together, you and I."

She nodded sharply, something almost approaching a smile came over her grim features, and so the pair separated; and on the morrow the arrangements were carried out with even greater ease than had been looked for. The ship's doctor was momentarily absent when Judith came for her charge, and there were no awkward questions to answer as to where she had come from. She was expected to call for the sick girl, and with the greatest tenderness Phyllis was entrusted to her charge; and a couple of hours afterwards, in her own room in Harrington's house, she still talked uneasily, moaning of Ralph and all the past that tortured her troubled brain.

Then, as Alfred Brand promised, all that London's medical skill could do was brought to bear to aid in her recovery.

Before the day had passed half a dozen trained nurses were upon the scene, and one of England's best physicians was gazing anxiously upon her.

"What is the meaning of it all?" he asked with professional coldness; "why have you delayed so long? Why did you not send for me before?"

"It is only a matter of last night," the millionaire replied, carefully schooled in his part by his friend.

"A matter of last night!" the physician ejaculated, startled into sharpness of tone. "A matter of last night! Impossible!"

Stephen shrugged his shoulders wearily. "Since last night," he answered slowly.

"I've never seen anything like it. What caused it? A shock, of course: what was it?"

"Is it necessary to say?" Harrington answered, sinking into a chair, the picture of wearied anxiety. "You are a man of the world, doctor, you can guess. A young and fascinating girl, my daughter, who must in time inherit my millions—a man, utterly unworthy of her—you can fit in the details."

"His name is Ralph, of course," the physician answered, and as in echo came the whisper from the girl: "Ralph, you do know I love you now, dear; don't you? And all through my bad temper."

Then, with a shriek, she struggled up in bed, almost fighting with the nurses who strove to restrain her.

"Save me, Ralph, save me!" she cried. "It's Stephen Harrington, the wretch who pretends to be my father, the man who wants to kill me, the man who has killed you! Oh, Ralph, save me!" And she fell back and moaned again.

"You can trace the story from her ravings," Stephen exclaimed quietly. He was so cold and determined now, with his co-conspirator to instruct him in every action. "I said she should be no daughter of mine if she did not give up this scoundrel."

"Yes, of course, I begin to understand," the doctor answered soothingly. "We'll do our best, poor girl! Put that pillow easier, nurse. I'll send her something; and while she sleeps after it cut her hair close to her head." With these and a dozen other directions, the physician left with a parting word of sympathy to the man so sorely tried.

Everything that could be done for the sufferer was done; and so as time passed, Death slunk away, defeated. The corner was turned, the physician told them all, in the early hours of the morning. Only care was needed now, and she would be well again.

For three weeks she had lain between life and death, and during that time Brand's instructions

had been carried out to the letter. The whole of the servants of the house had been changed, and not one who knew her in the old days was with her now.

More alone than she had ever been before, she lay sleeping now, the first natural sleep that her brain had known for so long, the sleep out of which she would awaken, the doctor had said, to life and reason once again.

"The worst was passed," he told them; but he only counted the matter professionally. For her the worst was to come! The awakening to life, to the knowledge of the past!

"Where am I?" she murmured faintly, and one of the nurses was instantly by her side, soothing her to restfulness and peace; and she, with her tired mind, as yet too weak to remember the past or judge the present, sank back to sleep again.

So the days passed, so little by little she recovered her strength, her brain still lying dormant, until slight thoughts of the past came to her gradually at night. Shadows which she strove to realize, puzzles which she tried in a weak way to solve, and sank into sleep again in doing so; until at last, with time came understanding. The morning sunlight was streaming into her room, and with her brain fresh and clear she awakened fully and gazed around her.

Where was she? In her own room. How had she got there? Last time she lived it was upon the boat. Stephen Harrington was beside her; he tried to murder her, as he had murdered Ralph.

A sob came into her throat as she thought that Ralph was dead, and the fever seemed to burn into her brain again; but it passed as her soul became filled with a brighter hope—the hope that Stephen had lied to frighten her, and that Ralph still lived.

But if that were so, where was he? How long had she been

where she was? What had happened?

A shadow fell upon her bed, and she glanced up into the face of Judith Brand.

CHAPTER XXI

"WAS IT A DREAM?"

PHYLLIS looked into the face of Judith Brand, and the old feeling of loathing came over her, with even a little dread, for there was now in the woman's beady eyes a tinge of triumphant hate, instead of the mock servility of the past.

"Where am I?" she asked faintly. "What has happened?"

"You met with an accident and you're in your own room," Judith retorted sharply. "You can see that for yourself. Your carriage broke down as you were driving from the theatre. You've had concussion of the brain. Keep yourself quiet."

The girl sank back again, and a pitiful look of trouble came over her face.

"My carriage broke down?" she murmured hesitatingly. "I cannot understand it. Where is Ralph?"

"Ralph?" Judith answered harshly; "Ralph who? You're dreaming; you haven't got over your delirium yet. You've been talking Ralph all the time you've been insensible. Ralph, and burning ships, and Madeira, and such like nonsense. Some trash you were reading just before you were ill, I suppose. Lie back and go to sleep." And with her usual noiseless tread, and an evil smile upon her thin lips, she passed out of the room, leaving Phyllis there, with her arms flung above her head, and her eyes staring wide open to the ceiling.

What did it all mean? Her head throbbed again, and the room swam round her, as she tried to think. "You're dreaming,"

Judith had said. "You have been talking of these things ever since you were taken ill." Was it a dream? Was it all the fancy of a tortured brain? Was the happiness of the past a mockery, the misery of the past only a terrible phantasy? The scene by the river side, the burning vessel, the rescue, Madeira, and Ralph! No, no, it could not be a dream.

She started up, and caught the hand of the nurse who sat by her bedside.

"You have no cause to hate me!" she cried wildly. "You have nothing to gain from me, nothing to hide from me; tell me the truth. I was not taken ill here, I know it. It was on a boat; the man who calls himself my father placed me upon it, to kill me, and yet at the last moment we were rescued. Ralph and I clung together, as the flames mounted upwards, and they took us upon a ship."

"Lie down and rest," the nurse said gently; "try and sleep."

"You do not believe me!" Phyllis answered wildly. "You think I am wandering again. We were rescued by a boat, Ralph and I, and taken to Maderia. It was there," she continued, and her voice grew softer, "there that Ralph told me he loved me; but he would come back to England. I feared it meant misery for us both; and we were so happy there." And she sank back again, the feverish colour faded from her cheeks, the light went from her eyes.

"Try and keep quiet, and get well soon," the nurse murmured soothingly; "perhaps, when you are well, he will come back."

"Then you do believe me, nurse?"

"Yes, miss," she replied; "of course I do." And as she spoke she scribbled a note to the physician, telling him of the continued delirium of the patient.

Alfred Brand's scheme was work-

ing, as he thought it would, to perfection. Its audacity was its greatest chance of success; and although he fully recognized that when Phyllis was quite well again, it might become difficult to prevent her from proving the truth of her own ideas, yet there were so many things that could be done to stop even that. She could be detained as insane; she could be sent upon the Continent in charge of Judith; or, what after all was the main point, he might by then have got all he wanted out of Harrington, and could leave him to fight his battles for himself.

It was the latter policy that pleased his purpose best; and so while Phyllis lay at death's door in one room, the quarrels in another became more and more frequent, as Alfred Brand provided for the future by forcing the money out of the reluctant grasp of his patron. The wealth of the millionaire, accumulated from the years of working of the Golden River, was being insidiously diminished by his co-conspirators, Judith and Alfred Brand, who now did not even trouble to give reasons for the sums they asked for, but demanded their thousands time after time.

They instructed, they demanded, and he was helpless.

He would have given the whole of what remained of his fortune to see Ralph enter and come upon him as an avenging angel, for that murder was their power over him; in all other things they were as guilty as himself.

If Ralph were only living—but Ralph was dead; and Phyllis, recovering but slightly in strength, was still kept almost a prisoner in her room, in the sole charge now of Judith Brand, who with fiendish cunning set herself to destroy the doubts that existed in the girl's mind.

Phyllis had relinquished talking about the past at all; she only sat now, wondering and wondering, again and again, if it could be true

that all was only a dream, if a dream could be so real, if she once loved—and still loved—only a vision of her fancy. "It cannot be," she murmured day after day. "It cannot be; I must get well and strong, and find out for myself."

Then, with her thoughts upon Madeira, came an idea that brought a flash of colour to her cheek, a brightening to her eyes, and a feeling of elation to her heart. At last the truth could be proved, at last she could know whether the past had lived at all, or if it was only a dream.

"Thinking of Ralph and Madeira, and your usual madness!" Judith exclaimed jeeringly, glancing into her face.

"Yes, I remember more of the past now," she answered firmly. "We wanted money, Ralph and I. I sold one of my rings. The circle of diamonds, with the ruby in the centre."

She looked keenly into the face of the woman, expecting to see some trace of guilt, some sign that should prove to her that she had rent the veil of lies, and that the past had lived; but there was nothing but contempt upon Judith's features, and she walked across, and taking out the jewel-case, drew forth the ring and flung it into the girl's lap.

"There's the ring you sold, you fool," she cried fiercely; "you and this lover of your mad brain—the one you sold at Madeira."

"I didn't say where," the girl cried sharply. "I said I sold it."

"Well, I suppose it was Madeira, that's your mad point, and you're getting too mad for any of us. Understand. More of this, and you'll go where people know how to look after raving maniacs and love-sick fools like you."

Heedless of Judith Brand's words, Phyllis took the ring in her hands and closely examined it. It was her own, there could be no doubt of that, the one that her dreams had told her she had parted with.

Then, after all, it was only a dream, only a disordered fancy. She had no happy past, Ralph had never existed, except in her mind, which had craved for love and sympathy until it had created them.

Helplessly she gazed upon the ring, and then to her brain came the solution of it all—the thought that was more agonizing than that the past had never been. Ralph must have left her upon the boat to get back her jewel; he never returned—and yet it was in her case.

Alfred Brand's plot had overreached itself. What he counted would either utterly induce the girl to give up her fancies or drive her to madness had failed, for it had thrown a clearer light upon everything.

In spite of the gnawing pain in her heart, that Stephen Harrington had accomplished his vengeance upon the man she loved, the condemnation of the murderer was plain to her. The past lived, it was no dream, and now she knew it. Ralph had left her to regain what he thought she prized. Stephen had killed and robbed him, and so all things were explained. Stephen Harrington killed him in Madeira.

The illness passed from her, her weakness faded before her longing for justice; even her sorrow at the death of him she loved was, for the time, numbed before that one soul-satisfying vow that those who had done this should suffer for their crime.

"You are satisfied?" Judith jeered.

"I am satisfied," she answered in deadly coldness; and the woman retreated a step from her as she rose, and, placing the ring upon her finger, stood looking into her face.

"I am satisfied," she said again. "Satisfied on all things. That you and your cousin, and the man who calls himself my father, are liars and thieves, and one of you something worse—a murderer!"

With a gasp of rage Judith

Brand caught her arm and wrist, and held her against the wall. "You're mad!" she cried savagely: "we've suspected it all along. Don't play these tragedy airs on me, or it's the madhouse you'll be in to-morrow. It's the madhouse you'll be in to-morrow, as it is, you fool," she shrieked in tigerish rage, and twisted the girl's arm until she winced with the pain.

"They'll teach you there to forget your follies. It's a padded cell and a strait-jacket you want, to quiet your nerves; and, as sure as you're alive, you shall have it. You hear me, you little vixen!" And with a jerk she flung her round and glared into her face.

It was almost Judith Brand's last glance, for, as Phyllis swung round, her right hand caught the silver candlestick upon the dressing-table, and, half demented with pain, furious with rage, she raised it aloft, and brought it down with all her force upon her assailant.

Missing Judith's head, it fell with a crash upon her wrist, and with a howl of pain she released her and staggered backwards.

Then, while the girl stood panting, ready to defend herself again, voices without broke the silence. That of Stephen Harrington and another—a drawling, self-satisfied voice, that of a man quite contented with himself and the whole world—and she recognized it, too, Reginald Neville-Whyte, the son of her one-time chaperon, a weak-minded man, but still a man—one who was not bound, body and soul, to this clique of soulless wretches, one who would, at least, believe and respect her.

"Very ill indeed," came Harrington's unctuous voice from without. "At times we feared for her reason."

"Shouldn't have thought her that kind of girl," was the drawled response; "seemed so smart——"

"Reginald, Reginald, help!" Phyllis' voice broke out.

"Be quiet, you cat. Hold your tongue, or I'll kill you!" Judith cried, springing towards her. And even as she did so the door was flung open, and Harrington and Reginald stood upon the threshold.

It was a position that held them spellbound. Judith, still holding her wounded wrist, gazed in fury at Phyllis. Stephen Harrington sought vainly for a clue to this new development, and Reginald glanced in mute bewilderment from one to another; yet, with it all, there was an expression upon his face, as he looked towards Phyllis, that gave her comfort. It seemed to her that she had not cried for help in vain. Ralph was dead—her heart chilled as the thought flashed through her mind—and yet she had one friend left to her still.

CHAPTER XXII

BACK FROM THE DEAD

STEPHEN HARRINGTON broke the silence. "My daughter bad again, Judith?" he queried, with a trembling solicitation in his tone. A trembling not simulated, for the helpless coward did not know where he stood, he still awaited the guiding word from the stronger mind.

"You can see for yourself," Judith muttered fiercely, as she held out her wrist. "She is mad; I can take the responsibility no longer. She must be removed."

"You see what I told you is true — unfortunately, only too true, Reginald," Stephen whispered to his companion. And Reginald nodded, and looked at the girl again.

He still gazed at her while silently she rolled up the sleeves of her dressing-gown, and bared her arm with the crimson patches of Judith's brutal fingers imprinted upon the skin.

"I had to hold her down," Judith muttered; "she's mad."

Still Reginald did not speak. He was just realizing that he worshipped the ground the girl walked upon; just realizing that there was a longing for murder in his heart against the woman who had used her so; realizing, too, that he had no courage—that he did not speak because he dared not.

"Reginald," Phyllis said softly, "you're the only friend in the world who is left to me. You see where I am, you see they are killing me; take me away, take me back to your mother."

"If you wish it," he answered hesitatingly, "and your father wishes it, I will; but—" he stumbled in his speech and stopped, thinking the while of his own cowardice. He would have given his life for this girl, but his disposition was too miserably weak even to stand up for her. He had not even lost his drawl. He spoke as though things were as they should be, and all was well. He realized that he loved her; but it gave him no courage, he wished himself somewhere else rather than facing this position.

"Reginald," the girl exclaimed piteously, "you are not going to desert me?—you, the only friend I have. This man who calls himself my father has tried to kill me!"

There was a gasp, a movement on the part of Stephen Harrington as though to interrupt; but she still continued:

"He put me upon a boat, bribing the crew to sink it, to kill me and the man I love."

Reginald started—"the man she loved!" It was a shock, but he took it as he took life altogether—with affected indifference.

"He killed him," she continued wearily, "brought me to England and now tells me I dreamed the whole; that he is not a murderer, when I know he is; that I am—" ^{at}

"More madness." ^{scans}

The voice cut like a knife, ^{with} all looked towards the door.

Alfred Brand was the man who interrupted. Not seeing a look or a cue from any one, he stood ready to fight the battle with his own consummate nerve and cunning.

"Poor girl," he murmured sympathetically; "has she been bad again?"

Reginald glanced at him as he spoke, and as he looked came courage. Alfred Brand's gifts had again helped his downfall. The cold, calculating voice gave determination to the younger man as, before his coming, hesitation had paralysed him.

"Has she told you her mad stories, too, Reginald?" Brand suavely interrogated.

"Who on earth are you?" Reginald drawled slowly. He still drawled, because it was the only way he had learned to speak.

"Mr. Harrington's partner," Brand answered, bewildered sufficiently to tell the truth. "You and I have met several times. You've heard, of course, all about our trouble."

"I've heard a portion of it. The remainder I expect to read about."

Brand interrogatively elevated his eyebrows. The man's manner was so polite, he scarcely followed the train of his drawing sentences.

"Old Bailey."

"Ah!"

"Hum! I should say so. Kidnapping and attempted murder."

"You don't mean to say you believe——"

"I mean to say nothing but this," the drawl had gone, and the words came as pistol shots. "If I can prove, and it's easy enough if true, that a boat took Phyllis from a burning vessel, I wouldn't be in your shoes for ten thousand pounds. And, by God, if it's to be proved, I'll prove it!"

"You must be a drivelling lunatic," Brand sneered; it was the only reply that came to his tongue, for his brain was busy upon his own position.

The game seemed up, and he settled his plans in a second. He would squeeze just a little more from Stephen, and, disappearing, leave that worthy to fight it out alone.

"We're all mad, we're all lunatics," Reginald responded sharply. "All save you three; but it happens our sanity is easily proved, and it will be my task to prove it. Ten minutes' inquiry to-morrow morning will be sufficient to gain enough evidence for the arrest of the whole lot of you."

Stephen Harrington glanced wildly from Brand to Reginald, and from Reginald back to Brand. His sluggish brain could find nothing to say, no excuse to bring forward, no lie sufficiently forcible to defend his position; and his supporters were falling away from him.

He could see it in Brand's indifference—the game was up for all of them, the rope was round his own neck, and they were preparing to scuttle away.

In agonies of terror he inwardly cursed himself for all his past life, and longed again that Ralph might yet come back, even though he wreaked his vengeance upon him, so that the other two might suffer.

"You will take me home, Reginald?" Phyllis asked anxiously.

"Better that you should stop here for the night, at least," he replied. "Believe me, you are in no danger now; they will not dare to lay a finger upon you. My mother will come for you in the morning. Lock yourself in your own room till then."

He motioned to Stephen to go, and, like a whipped cur, the man slunk out of the room; and, with a careless shrug of the shoulders, Brand followed him, while Judith brought up the rear. "What was the use," Brand thought, "of making a disturbance? His game was played; he was fairly contented with his position, and it

seemed to him that, if he quietly disappeared, there was a chance of his being forgotten, while Harrington suffered for his greater crime."

He knew the formalities to be gone through, the weight of evidence that must be gathered together, before the police would dare to arrest a millionaire on the charge of murder, or even attempted murder; and so he told himself complacently that he had ample time to get to the other side of the world, into one of those corrupt little republics where even English justice can be jeered at.

"Yes," he thought reflectively, "everything was all right for him, he need not hurry." But he did not know that in a mail train, dashing towards London, Ralph Chesleigh sat in the corner of a carriage, nursing in his heart the cold delights of vengeance.

Reginald had stayed behind to whisper a few parting words of consolation to Phyllis, and Stephen caught Brand's arm.

"What are you going to do?" he whispered excitedly.

"Clear out," was the laconic reply. "The game's up; take my advice, and do the same."

"But think of what we lose," Stephen answered; "the Golden River is producing half a million a year now. That's two hundred and fifty thousand a piece. Think of it!"

Harrington knew his partner in one thing; it was useless to appeal in any form but money.

"There's millions for both of us," he continued, "if we only get over this point."

Brand's eyes sparkled dully at the thought, but he had a steady-
ing amount of common-sense.

"It can't be done," he answered.

"Unless——" Stephen bent forward and whispered in his ear.

"You think so?" Brand asked, and hope was in his voice again.

"I'm sure."

"Then we'll try it as the last shot."

Reginald came from the room and there sounded the grating of a key as the door was locked behind him. He scarcely glanced at the three who stood there awaiting him, for his heart was filled with an elation born of the knowledge that he was doing right, and more than that, holding the whip hand. He passed down the stairs, and they silently followed; and then he turned towards them and spoke.

"I need not warn you to be careful," he exclaimed as he leisurely drew on his gloves. "I leave Phyllis here, knowing she is as safe as if the three of you were hanged."

Alfred Brand came forward to him and placed his hand upon his shoulder.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "you're a man of brains—a man of common-sense. You've formed your opinion, and because you're a sensible man you'll be ready to hear both sides. We couldn't talk upstairs. Come into the library."

Reginald hesitated; but the grip upon his shoulder drew him forward, and he entered the room, while Stephen and Judith trailed in the background.

"Well," he exclaimed as he stood there, "what now?"

"Sit down and listen," Brand answered. "Up to now you know part of the truth. Now, to save a scandal, you must know the whole."

"You're putting yourself out of the way to oblige me, I'm sure," Reginald drawled, and the sarcastic tinge in his voice brought a droop to Alfred Brand's mouth. He would have given a big sum to have known if the one addressing him was a man playing the fool, or a fool playing the man. He was playing a blind game himself, too—he didn't know his own cards; while, more wonderful still for Alfred Brand, he didn't know those of his opponent.

"It's as well you should hear

the whole truth," he suavely answered. "Phyllis is young, impressionable, and an heiress. She formed an attachment for a man whom her father could never approve, a man whom neither you nor I would call our friend; and hence brain fever, for Stephen literally kicked him out."

"Then Phyllis, ideas of attempts upon her life, her misery upon the burning ship——"

"All utter nonsense, my dear Reginald; utter nonsense, wanderings of her poor troubled brain," Stephen interjected with fervour.

"If no Cape liner has rescued a man and a woman from a sinking ship, I'll express my apologies," Reginald responded, and he made to rise from the seat he had taken; but the hand of Alfred Brand restrained him, and the man leant forward and spoke in an undertone.

"If that man had been like yourself, Reginald," he murmured softly, "it would have been so different. If you had been he, Stephen would have said nothing."

Reginald made no answer, but looked into the face of the man who bent towards him, one hand upon his wrist, and his eyes glancing sharply into his face.

"It's a girlish fancy," he continued, "and she will soon forget it. She looks upon you as her dearest friend. Stephen will settle ten thousand a year upon her, and all is hers when he dies. Why not?"

"I don't exactly follow the drift of your remarks," Reginald answered.

"I think you begin to a little," was Brand's reply, uttered in that urbane, coaxing voice he could assume when circumstances needed.

"My friend Stephen could only treat that man with contempt; with you it is different, you are worthy of her. She has affection for you; in a week or so she would be in love with you and willing to become your wife. Take her

and ten thousand a year. You're in love with her now, and know it!"

The younger man's sallow skin became crimson as the thought of what might be flashed through his mind. Phyllis to be his! To do him credit, he did not think of the money, except as something very much in the back ground; but she would be his—and why not?

"Phyllis will then be your wife," Brand repeated, wisely leaving out all further mention of the money. "She is fond of you now, and you desire no more."

Reginald clenched his trembling hands and tried to put the temptation from him.

"And my inquiries of to-morrow," he jerked.

"Will be forgotten; they are of no service if Phyllis becomes your wife."

"In a word, you're buying me."

"In a word, yes, we're buying you," Brand exclaimed icily. "We're buying you, and giving you the highest price your soul knows—Phyllis."

"And I refuse it."

"Then you're a cursed fool."

"Maybe, but I refuse it." And, without daring to continue the discussion, Reginald took his hat and stick from the table and departed.

Judith rose and glanced at Brand for a hint.

"All over," he whispered, as he opened the door for her to pass out. "I shall leave Charing Cross to-morrow by the morning mail;" and then, carefully shutting the door after her, he came back and touched Stephen upon the shoulder.

"Everything is done," he said; "unless——"

"Unless what?"

"That jewel you stole from Ralph at Limehouse, the Jewel of Death—use it."

Stephen shivered apprehensively and shook his head. "No," he answered, "we're beaten; it's as you say, all over."

"Well, I've had enough myself, Stephen; take my advice, and make yourself scarce. I'm off to Brazil, and, as a parting keepsake, I'll ask your autograph, say on a cheque for twenty thousand."

"You're not going to bleed another farthing out of me, Alfred," Stephen replied phlegmatically.

"You wouldn't care for me to inform the police——"

"I don't care a curse what you do," he fiercely answered. "I say this, you shan't have another penny out of me. I'm not going to be bullied and threatened any longer. There's attempted murder against you——"

"It's not so bad as the accomplished fact, Stephen."

"Not another penny."

"Think it over, Stephen; I shall be at my rooms up to nine to-morrow morning. Good-night."

With a last glance at the man, who sat staring into vacancy, Alfred Brand departed; and as the door closed behind him the millionaire rose from his seat and paced the room.

"Not another penny," he muttered again; "not a farthing, you blood-sucking thief, not a farthing."

* * *

Phyllis turned the key upon Reginald, and sat to await the morrow. For a while the hum of voices came from below; and then the house grew quiet and only the sound of the striking of the clocks broke the stillness, and told of the speeding hours.

A crash and a noise of scuffling awakened her from the light sleep into which she had fallen; then came silence for moments which seemed like years, and then a blow upon her door.

"Who is there? What is it?" she cried.

"It is I, Judith; open the door."

"What has happened?"

"Your father has been murdered!"

With a half shriek, Phyllis flung open the door and gazed into the face of the woman, who lay huddled in the corner, her face hidden in her hands.

"Murdered?" she gasped.

"Don't speak of it, he looks awful."

"Who has done it?"

"There is only one man who has cause to—this lover of yours, Ralph Chesleigh."

CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE TRACK

FOR hours Ralph lay where he had fallen, in a dense thicket of stunted pines that grew out upon a lower ledge of rock some hundreds of feet below where he and Stephen Harrington had galloped. The struggling horses had crashed through the trees, snapping the branches with their weight, and pitched over clear to the bottom of the ravine; but, by luck that was nothing short of Providential, he had been caught midway, and had escaped with his life. He lay there, terribly cut and bruised, and with his left arm broken; but he was alive.

When in the cool of the evening his senses gradually returned, it was some moments before he realized his position; and then, slowly, it all came back to him—the chase after Harrington and the terrible descent over the precipice. He struggled painfully to his feet and attempted the tedious journey back to Funchal; but the pain of his arm was excruciating, and in the darkness he could find no safe path, for the loose stones and rocks slipped from beneath his feet and went clattering and echoing below. There was no chance of any one passing by what was the merest mule tract, and he had no alternative but to remain until daylight.

Then, when the dawn broke, the chilling damp air of the night

had added to his trouble, for fever was coursing through his veins. Hours later he was discovered, and taken back to Funchal. They carried him to the Quinta da Bella Vista, where for weeks he hovered between life and death; until the day came when life conquered, and, convalescent, he could sit out upon the flowered balcony and gaze across to the rippling bay, longing for the time when he should be upon a ship's deck again and going home to England.

After a little while the doctor allowed him to go about in a bullock carro, and his first journey was to the Rua dos Murças to enquire for any letters or telegrams. He had sent a messenger again and again, but the first time he could move it was there he went, in case a mistake had been made.

A prey to terrible anxieties, he could not understand why Phyllis had not telegraphed to him; but to-day there was one message awaiting him, and he tore it open excitedly, only to crumple it up and cast it away directly. It was not from her. It was only a telegram from the friend whom he had met upon the boat—the man who lent him the £50—asking to what bank in London he should pay in the £5,000, Ralph's share of the Reos sale, as he was soon leaving England again.

The reply was to be wired to the Hotel Trafalgar, Charing Cross. "Why could she not have sent some news?" he cried bitterly to himself; and he fretted and worried until at last the day of sailing came.

He longed to send a message that he was well and coming back to her. But where? Where could he send it? Where was she?

He did not trouble about Harrington at all now; he did not connect the two, for all his thoughts were with Phyllis, wondering why

she had not sent to him—hoping for the best, but fearing some evil yet unknown to him.

During the voyage back to England Ralph mixed with the other passengers as little as possible, but devoted his time to writing—to setting forth clearly the whole of the incidents of Stephen Harrington's infamy, the revolution in Santa Teresa, the Jewel of Death, the scene in the Bohemian Club, the attempted murder on the *Deliverance*, and the rescue by the *Tuscany*, down to the finding of Harrington in Madeira, his own injury, and Harrington's escape.

No single detail was omitted, and the pile of paper grew day by day, grew into a heap of damning sheets that told the story of a web of crime—a web not yet spun to completion.

"It's a heavy indictment against you, Stephen Harrington," he muttered as he signed the last page and sealed up the packet in an envelope bearing the flag of the Cape line and the name of the vessel. "A very heavy one; and let me once set foot in England, I'll prove it all right up to the hilt."

The four days on shipboard passed, and never did voyager homeward bound from foreign climes see with greater joy the cliffs of his native land rise in majestic splendour from the dark green waves than did Ralph Chesleigh on the sunny morning when Plymouth hope in sight.

From Plymouth to Paddington the train appeared to crawl, from Paddington to Fenchurch Street his hansom seemed to loiter, and at last he entered the office of the shipping company, and asked if there were any letters for him. Vain hope that had buoyed him up a little on the voyage! No, none; and with his disappointment crushing down upon him he walked out into the busy City streets, and stood as one dazed, not knowing what to do.

Mechanically he walked westward, and then suddenly there flashed across his mind a thought that thrilled his heart and quickened his step. His friend, the man who greeted him so heartily upon the boat, and who had telegraphed to Funchal, surely he must have seen Phyllis, surely he must be able to give him some news about her. He remembered the hotel to which he was to send his reply, *The Trafalgar*. Ten minutes later he stood in the entrance hall enquiring for Mr. Dornnton; and even as he did so the man he sought descended the stairs.

"What, Ralph!" he cried boisterously, as he caught sight of his friend.

"Yes, Harry, back again in England, and I want to see you particularly."

He glanced into Ralph's anxious face, and his tone changed.

"Anything the matter?"

"I'm worried to death. I want your advice. I must have five minutes with you."

"You're only just in time to catch me."

"You must spare me five minutes, Harry. It's a matter of life and death to me!"

"Then tell me what you want. My time is yours; I can alter my arrangements."

"You came to England by the *Moscow*?"

"Yes, of course; you left me on board, and I wondered why you didn't return. I thought we were going to have a jolly trip together—"

"Don't talk of that. Do you recollect the people on board? Do you remember a pretty girl, with blue eyes and chestnut hair?"

"Yes. There was a bit of sensation about her."

"Sensation!" Ralph gasped. "How?"

"Well, she tried to commit suicide directly the boat left Madeira."

"Good God!"

"Tried to throw herself overboard, and was only saved just in the nick of time by one of the passengers."

Ralph sat staring before him into vacancy, and Harry continued.

"We were all at dinner, when a shriek rang through the saloon, and every one rushed on deck to find the girl unconscious in the arms of a man who had just seized her as she was throwing herself into the sea."

Still Ralph sat silent, an unknown terror gripping his mind.

"What's the matter?" his friend asked sympathetically. "Did you know her?"

"Yes, yes. It's why I've sought you out. What happened then?"

"She was taken to her berth and next morning the doctor told us she was down with brain fever."

"Well, and then? Can't you see you're driving me mad with anxiety? What became of her? Where is she?"

"I know very little more. The man who rescued her seemed to take a kind of sentimental interest in her; and I heard that he promised when the vessel got into docks, to send and have her looked after in some hospital or the other in which he was interested. If I had known she was a friend of yours, Ralph—"

"What was the man like?" Ralph sharply interjected, his suspicions becoming a horror of certainty.

"Oh, as far as I can remember, a big, stoutish fellow."

"Fair, with shifty grey eyes?"

"Yes, that sort of man."

"Drooping moustache, and a little white scar in the left-hand corner of the mouth?"

"Yes; and, by the way, he'd lost a front tooth—do you know him?"

"I know the man," Ralph answered in a bloodless passion. "I know him, and God help him!"

"As bad as that, Ralph?"

"As bad as that, Harry. Good-night."

His friend took his hand, and gripped it firmly. "We're not in South America, lad," he said grimly; "don't lose your head. I'm not going to offer my help; you don't need it. But don't lose your head. If you want a friend, you know where to find one. Good-night and good luck! Hope for the best!"

Twenty minutes later a swift hansom had sped westward and put Ralph Chesleigh down at the corner of the square near Harrington's house.

It was dark now, and a thin drizzling rain was falling in the almost deserted streets, making the pavements shiny and driving pedestrians swiftly homeward—a fine, penetrating rain that chilled one to the marrow.

For a moment he paused in the shelter of a doorway, and wondered what course of action he should take; and then quickly made up his mind for a sudden attack, get in the first blow, and chance to luck for the result.

At all costs he must see Harrington; see him alone, and face to face. Force from him where Phyllis was, rescue her—and then? Well, then, he had laid out the whole story in black and white, and other hands than his would see full justice done.

He walked toward's the millionaire's mansion, and entered the grounds by a side gate.

A bright beam of light from a window, where the blinds were still undrawn, struck across the damp curtain formed by the misty rain; and, raising himself upon a little coping, Ralph shielded his eyes with his hand and gazed into the study of Stephen Harrington.

For an instant his blood seemed to chill at the sight that met his eyes. An avenging hand was before his. His old enemy, the man who had done him injury

beyond reparation, was struggling in the grasp of a powerful assailant, who had dashed him backwards across the table, overturning everything upon it; and in the second that Ralph looked through the man drove a knife which he held aloft straight into Stephen's chest, and he rolled over with a cry, and lay there, still.

With his desire for vengeance gone, his soul revolting at the murder, Ralph burst into the room with a shout of wild anger and grappled with the man, who sought to escape through the window by which he had entered.

The man who had stabbed Harrington fought desperately with Ralph, whose coat was almost torn from his back in the struggle; and then overpowering him by sheer force of strength, he threw him fiercely backwards and made off through the drizzling night.

In an instant Ralph had recovered and started in hot pursuit, dashing across the grounds and over the wet, slippery pavements, fiercely pursuing, with his blood wildly coursing through his veins, the man who had murdered his life-long enemy, Stephen Harrington.

CHAPTER XXIV

ALFRED BRAND'S DISCOVERY

As one who knew the neighbourhood by heart, the man twisted and doubled, keeping ever in the side streets and squares; where no help was near; and still Ralph held him in view and followed.

Once or twice a passer by stood and gazed after them, too bewildered to give chase; and Ralph, fearful lest the murderer should escape, did not stop for a second to gain assistance. He had forgotten that the man who was killed was his own deadly enemy—forgotten everything, save that the one he pursued was a murderer whom he had caught red-handed.

In five minutes the wealthy streets and squares were left behind; his quarry was making for the slums, which always lie within easy distance of the houses of the great. Half a dozen times he thought he had lost him; half a dozen times he found him again, slinking in the shadows, until, being observed, he started off at full speed once more. The man was almost spent, but fifty yards divided them, when, with a quick glance over his shoulder, he dashed across the road and darted up a long dark alley.

Without pausing to think, Ralph rushed after him. A door at the further end opened and shut with a bang; it crashed open again, as he flung himself against it, and he found himself in a passage as dark as pitch.

The impetus with which he entered drove him the whole length of the passage, and threw him full tilt upon a closed door, against which he banged with his fists and listened.

Not a sound broke the silence. He beat on it again and again, but no answer came; and then, with the idea of giving an alarm and getting help, he retraced his steps in the blackness to the door where he had entered.

He found it by walking suddenly against it. It was closed, and by some method locked. His fingers could find no hold, and no handle or latch.

He was imprisoned, trapped like a rat, where he knew not. All he could realize was that he stood in a narrow passage, a heavy door at either end, and both locked.

Not a sound broke upon his thoughts. It was the silence and the blackness of the grave; and as the minutes crawled by, and the excitement of the fierce pursuit passed from him, he cursed himself for the mad, headstrong folly that had placed him where he was, blaming himself the more because of the fact that Phyllis, who

needed him the most now, was more than ever alone.

He struck a match and glanced around him; and yet the light told him no more than he knew. He stood in a narrow passage, and at each end was a door locked against him.

The match burnt down to his fingers, and he dropped it, and waited; how long he could not tell, but his hand was upon his revolver, and even a fancied sound brought a throb to his heart.

Then—it happened so suddenly that he did not realize it until all was over—the further door was flung open, and, as he blinked in the brightness of the light, a dozen hands gripped him; and he was disarmed and dragged into the room.

It needed but a glance to show him into what he had stumbled. A common London gaming-house, in one of those quarters where, except in extreme cases, raids are few and far between.

For the moment gambling was suspended, and a motley crowd of evil-looking scoundrels, chiefly low-bred foreigners, were standing around the man whom he had chased, the roulette wheel and the white-marked, baize-covered tables being deserted.

"It's nothing to do with the police, gentlemen," a man was saying as he entered. "I've just settled a private score of my own, and this fool," he prefixed the noun with a series of lurid adjectives, "thought fit to chase me." He walked across and blew a mouthful of smoke into Ralph's face; and the men who held him had to grip him tighter.

A look of perplexity came over his features, and he spat upon the floor and narrowly eyed Ralph again.

"Strike me dead!" he snarled at last; "if you're not the man I had on my boat, to put out of the way, you're his cursed twin brother."

"The *Deliverance*," Ralph interjected, in spite of himself.

"Aye, the *Deliverance*. So you are the skunk, are yer. Take him upstairs, boys; bind him well, he's the most slippery cuss I've met yet, and chuck him into the attic."

Without the chance of saying a word, Ralph was dragged away up several flights of stairs, and flung upon the floor in a room on the top storey.

The man below, discarding his cigar, took a clay pipe from his pocket and carefully filled and lighted it.

"Get on with the game, gentlemen," he remarked; "it's nothing to do with the police. There's no chance of a raid on Joe Battent's place; but when you kill a man, as you think, as dead as door nails, and find he's been a-chasing you, well, it's inclined to make you think that you won't make a mistake next time."

Joe Battent, the scoundrelly captain of the *Deliverance*—for it was he whom Ralph had followed so keenly, he who had murdered his patron, Stephen Harrington—took a seat in the corner and thought over his position.

Times had changed since he was the captain of the boat which was burnt in the Channel. He, like Alfred Brand, had discovered in the millionaire a ready tool for his blackmailing, and finding some one always to his hand to be squeezed, had given up the sea and started a gambling den in the slums, as near as possible to his patron's house.

The millionaire had proved a fruitful source of income to the scoundrel who had done his dirty work—until to-night.

To-night Joe Battent wanted five hundred pounds, to complete a deal for a set of diamonds stolen upon the Continent, and worth twenty times the figure asked for them. Quite at ease, he had made his impudent demand, and had met with a point blank and ab-

solute refusal. Stephen Harrington had grown tired of the life he was leading, and was utterly reckless. As he refused Brand, so he refused Battent; but, whereas the former knew the folly of attempting to further force him, the latter did not. Fiendish with disappointment, and, as usual, more than half drunk, he stormed, raved and threatened, until he raised the passion in Stephen's heart to a level with his own, and the millionaire, suddenly rising, flung himself upon him.

Then, in a few seconds, all was over. Stephen Harrington was dead. For money he had always lived, for money he had died, stabbed to the heart by one of those evil associates which his ill-gotten wealth had gained for him. He died a death as violent as his own methods; died, and not a spasm of regret found its way into the heart of any one.

Joe Battent rose from his seat and motioned one of the gamblers to come into the corner.

"I'm going to cut. It's too hot. I'll sell you the show, money down."

"How much?"

"Five hundred. It's worth it. Every card's marked, and every wheel tricked."

"Give you two."

"Five."

"Two; not another penny. You've got to cut. It's no good to you."

"I can give the show away, can't I?"

"I'll give you two not to."

"All right, then, curse you for a Jew; hand it over—gold."

"How about the man upstairs?"

"Keep him for a week. Give me a chance to clear, and then chuck him out."

The men went off together, and ten minutes after Joe Battent was on his way to Limehouse.

* * *

Back in Stephen Harrington's house the terrible charge that

Judith Brand made against Ralph seemed to freeze Phyllis Stanton's heart. That he was safe, that he was back in London, was but a spark of happiness, chilled by that awful accusation. She dared not think that the man she loved, even with the provocation he had had, would take such an awful revenge. Murder! It seemed to terrify her, as it did the woman still shrinking in the corner.

"Are you sure Stephen is dead?" she whispered, and her voice sounded as one strange to her. "He may be only wounded; it is our duty to save his life, if we can. Send for your cousin and a doctor; arouse the house. I will see now if he is past assistance." And without waiting for Judith to move she passed down the staircase.

The door of the millionaire's study was open, not a sound came from within; and as she stood at the threshold, hesitating and fearing to enter, as any woman would, something bright upon the carpet caught her eye, and slowly she stooped to pick it up.

Then the fear upon her face became an imprint of horror, and she caught at the portière curtains, and clenching them tightly in her hands stood swaying from side to side, burying her face in the heavy folds, still holding in her grasp the spade guinea with the initials "R. C." engraved upon it—the coin that she knew Ralph wore upon his chain.

He had been here to meet his old enemy, and that man was dead!

With the whole world swinging around her, she still had sufficient consciousness to place the betraying coin in her pocket; and then her hold upon the curtains relaxed, and she fell in a faint upon the floor.

It was Alfred Brand who found her there when, some ten minutes later, with the white-faced servants huddled behind him, he reached the door of the dead man's study.

"Take her up to her room," he said curtly, and passed in.

There was no shade of fear, no shadow of pity or remorse, in his face as he stood and gazed around. It was simply a new and unexpected development of what he called "the game."

Stephen Harrington was dead—murdered, they told him; and he wondered how he, personally, would be affected. Strange, if not for the better, it seemed to him; and glancing down upon the murdered man he stood without a shiver, and decided it must certainly be a move to his advantage. Then his sharp eyes glistened, for by the side of a small table that had been overturned lay a packet of papers.

It was the story of Stephen Harrington's crimes that Ralph had written upon the boat. In the struggle with Joe Battent they had been torn from his pocket, and now remained as ever-damning evidence in the room of the murdered man—a story to which it seemed the millionaire's awful death was but a fit and proper ending.

Alfred Brand broke the seal of the envelope, and glanced rapidly over the closely-written pages; and then a low whistle broke from his lips.

"Ralph Chesleigh's work, eh!" he muttered. "He would never have crossed my mind. I told Stephen he ought to have shot him."

Carefully replacing the papers in the envelope, he slipped it into his breast pocket.

"It would be unwise to say anything about it," he thought. "Let the police find their own clue and stick to it. These are too valuable to give away."

The entrance of the doctor interrupted his musings; and at once the craftiness fell from his face, and he became the bewildered and concerned partner, the man who struggled to keep his senses

together because it was necessary, but who was all the while inconsolable at the loss, the violent death, of his dearest friend.

Two people preserved silence in all the inquiries which followed: Phyllis, because of the terrible evidence she possessed that the man she loved must have been present in Stephen Harrington's study on the night of the murder; Alfred Brand, because he realized more than ever, as each hour passed, what a valuable discovery he had made, and what that secret would be worth to him.

Honestly he believed that Ralph was the murderer of Stephen, the mere fact of Ralph keeping away removing any doubt, if he had ever had it; but of what use was it for him to give that information to the authorities? Alfred Brand always sold to the highest bidder, and assuredly the one who would pay the most was not the police.

Never inclined to move in a hurry, he calmly waited until the ground should be quite clear for him to work; and there grew in his mind the thought that his price could, indeed, be very heavy, for it seemed to him that Phyllis also suspected who had done the deed. He could see it in the strained expression of her features, the anguish and sorrow printed deeply in her face, far more than the death of Stephen, tragic though it was, in any way seemed to justify.

She had left the house, and now stayed at that of her chaperon, Mrs. Neville Whyte; and Brand, taking occasion to see her as much as possible, found his theory strengthened every day, for her manner was that of a girl who held a terrible secret in her heart, and feared to talk lest a word might come out, and dared not sleep lest then she should betray herself.

Upon the first news of the murder of Stephen, Brand took himself severely to task for not having thought of such a contingency

as his death, sudden or otherwise, and seen that he was well provided for in the will; but his discovery of the papers satisfied him again. There was no doubt that Stephen had robbed the girl all her life, and he would probably leave her the money on his death. It was for Brand to sell her lover's life at the highest price he could get for it.

It was time for him to move. He had carefully considered all points, and knew he must succeed. Phyllis received him immediately in response to his request for a private interview, and any one but Alfred Brand would have felt his heart soften at the piteous glance she gave him.

"You wish to see me?"

"Yes," he answered, sinking his voice to a whisper. "It's about the murder; the police have got a clue. One they know is right."

Her breath came in a sharp gasp.

"You think it is the right man?"

"No. I know it isn't. You and I are the only people in the world who know the man's name who murdered Stephen."

CHAPTER XXV

BUYING A LIFE

ALFRED BRAND had his eyes fixed upon Phyllis, and, as he saw the look in her face become a glance of terror, he felt satisfied that the game was in his own hands, and he could play it as he chose.

"You and I both know," he said, leaning towards her, "that there was only one man in the world who had an eternal grudge against Stephen, and you and I know that man's name. Stephen chose the policy of pretending this man had never lived. We know the truth, and we know that Ralph——"

"Hush!" she interrupted.

"We are alone; what does it matter? We know that Ralph Chesleigh killed Stephen."

"We cannot know it. We do not know where Ralph is," Phyllis answered stonily. "You are assuming this for some purpose of your own. I do not believe him guilty, and I will not. Ralph Chesleigh is an honest Englishman, and not the man to commit such a dastardly crime."

"You are misunderstanding and misjudging me," Brand quietly interjected. "You are treating me as an enemy when I am your friend."

"I do not desire your friendship," she answered fiercely. "I will not have it. Your whole life has proved you to be a scoundrel, and now, for reasons which I do not know, you come to me and seek to lie yourself into my confidence."

She rose from her seat and looked down upon him in contempt.

"It is you who were Stephen Harrington's devil," she cried. "It is you that forced him into villainy, and you who stand guilty of his murder. Not because you have yourself committed it, but because it is you who led him on until vengeance overtook him."

"Until your lover killed him!"

"It's a lie! a lie worthy of yourself. He would not, he could not, commit so foul a crime; I will never believe him guilty. And you have come for something more than this. Tell me what you want, and go!"

"I have come to offer you my friendship."

"Which I refuse, utterly and absolutely. Your whole life has proved you to be what you are—a cowardly wretch. I refuse your friendship. The thought of holding you as a friend is worse than the misery you have caused. I hate and loathe you. That is my answer. Go!"

She walked across the room, and pressed the button of the bell.

"What are you going to do?"

"Have you shown from the

house, and forbid you ever entering it again."

Brand came towards her and looked into her face.

"You have rung the bell," he said quietly; "and when the servant comes you will not tell him to show me to the door, but merely to serve tea; and the reason is this, that I hold in my pocket evidence that will end Ralph Chesleigh's life."

"It's untrue, I swear it——"

"Then turn me from the house, and prove your belief in his innocence and what you call my villainy. You dare not! I can see it in your eyes. You know he is guilty, as I do. Why make an enemy of one who wishes to be your friend? Here is the servant. Make your choice."

"Serve tea," she said, and, walking back to her seat, sat looking vacantly before her until the man had closed the door behind him, and then she turned fiercely towards Alfred Brand again.

"What is it you want?" she cried passionately. "Say it at once! Don't come to me under the hypocritical guise of friendship. We are bitter enemies, and we'll meet as such! Why are you here? What end of your own do you want to serve?"

"I have sufficient evidence in my pocket to hang a man in whom you are interested. I don't care a snap whether he's hanged or not; but if I choose I can do it. That evidence is for sale; buy it, and you buy his life. Refuse, and——" he shrugged his shoulders. "Of course, you buy!"

"What is the evidence?"

"This." He drew the packet from his pocket that he had picked up in Stephen Harrington's room. "You know the writing. This is a full account of the quarrels between Stephen Harrington and Ralph Chesleigh, and every word breathes revenge. I found it in the study, after the murder. If I give it to the authorities, there is a fine

and cry throughout London ; and this evidence is enough to condemn him twice over. If you buy it, you do what you choose."

She glanced at the packet which he held towards her, and as she did so, the last ray of hope, the last feeling that circumstances lied and made the man she loved appear in such an awful light, faded from her.

"Read the papers through," Brand exclaimed quietly ; and, obeying him, she did so.

She read the story of which she knew so much already. The record of the early days in South America, of which Ralph had told her, the attacks and perils which they had suffered together.

And with it all there cried through the closely written pages the desire for justice—for vengeance. Ralph Chesleigh writing upon the boat, overwrought with anxiety for the woman he loved, his breast raging at the last vile attempt his enemy had made upon him, wrote as one who lived for vengeance only.

"I am on the way to England now," he finished, "on the road to the consummation of my revenge. An eye for an eye, Stephen. As you have sown, so shall you reap."

She placed the sheets upon the table, and then, with a half sob, her head drooped lower, and the room became obscured and swam around her. The utter hopelessness of her heart brought the tears welling to her eyes, and she longed for nothing but to fling herself down alone and weep over her misery by herself.

Ralph had been vilely treated by Stephen as no man ever had before, and in the moment of wild desire for revenge had killed the man who wronged him. Looked at clearly, it seemed almost justice ; but her heart shrank from the thought that he had done it. She loved him, she would give her life for his even now ; but she never wanted to look into his face again.

In a strange, wistful way, she thought even at this supreme

moment that when all was over she would leave for some quiet part of the world, and, forgetting the horror of her past, live in remembrance of the happy days they spent together in Madeira—live in the recollection of what Ralph was to her then, before this happened.

Stephen had always been bad, and Ralph—poor Ralph—she found herself wondering where he was now, wishing almost that she might go to him.

Stephen had been a traitorous friend, an unscrupulous enemy, and had paid the penalty ; and the man who had been a devil at his elbow, tempting him to make a further move in villainy, to take another step towards perdition, sat opposite her now to barter for the life of the man she loved.

At least he should not read her heart. With an effort, she forced the agitation and emotion from her face and looked calmly towards him again.

Perhaps her heart would break as time passed ; but this man should not see a tear.

"Well," she said coldly, "I've read the papers."

"And they prove ?"

"Nothing."

"A matter of opinion. To me they prove Ralph Chesleigh returned on that night, and in a fit of passion stabbed the man who had done him injuries so great that his murder seems almost just !"

"I'm not buying your deductions, but your evidence."

The stern, hard tones in her voice completely surprised Alfred Brand. He had expected hysterics, tears and sobs ; he found her bartering as collectedly as though it were merely a trifle. But then, even he could not read her thoughts, and could only judge by how she looked and what she said.

"You offer, what ?"

"A thousand pounds. It is all I have. Give me the papers, and you shall have the money."

The look of quiet amusement

upon Alfred Brand's face was a study.

"My dear child," he remarked suavely, "you underrate your potentialities. You don't know what you're worth. I suppose you mean that out of the money that that old thief Harrington——"

"Let the dead rest. I'll give you all I have—a thousand pounds."

"And the price is half a million. Take it or leave it."

"You're mad!"

"No, quite sane. You don't know it yet, but I suppose you're one of the richest women in England. Harrington stole your mine, and, as a matter of sentiment, I shouldn't wonder if, at his death, he willed it back to you. That means in invested funds you're worth a million, in prospective profits as many more as you like. For half a million you can buy this man's life. Will you pay it?"

"Yes!"

"Then, we'll——"

"That will do. We've settled our bargain. Go!"

With a curl of the lip, Alfred Brand gathered up his papers and, carefully placing them in his pocket, walked towards the door. As he reached it an idea seemed to strike him, and he paused, turned and looked back at her again.

"It's just possible," he said, "that Stephen has not been so honest as we give him credit for. Maybe he has willed his money somewhere else; and if that be so, you shall have the papers for a thousand."

"Yes, I understand," she answered icily. "If I am not the wealthy woman you think I may be, my last penny is better than nothing. Very well, you shall have that."

With a comprehensive nod, he opened the door and went out. Then, as he left, she sank upon her knees, and, murmuring "Ralph, poor Ralph!" buried her face in the cushions of the lounge by which she had fallen.

Alfred Brand pondered a little on his own theories as he walked towards the City. While he was thinking over his position, the girl was upon her knees, sobbing as though her heart would break; but he was strolling quietly along, wondering exactly how he stood.

It was possible that Stephen had bequeathed his money, in some mad freak, to charities; it was possible that by some error he had left the money to Phyllis as his daughter, and as she was not it meant complications. There were many things that might be; and Alfred Brand, as the consummate scoundrel he was, determined to see exactly what the position was.

To stay in England for half a million was worth a certain amount of risk; for a paltry thousand, no. Calling a cab, he gave the order to be driven to Harrington's solicitors.

CHAPTER XXVI

STEPHEN HARRINGTON'S REVENGE

MR. EDWARD CRISP, the senior partner of the well-known firm of Crisp and Wingrove, solicitors, received Mr. Alfred Brand with cold politeness.

As a keen business man, he had taken Brand's measurement years ago, and by the manner in which his advice was received by Harrington on more than one occasion, when he had ventured to suggest it would be better if the millionaire broke with his partner altogether, he judged that in some way Alfred Brand held the whip-hand.

It was under the urgent advice of his solicitor that Stephen Harrington drew up a will, which did justice, though only tardy justice, to the girl he had so villainously ill-used, and left Alfred Brand without even the conventional mourning ring.

Harrington made his will at the time when Phyllis was just recovering from her serious illness, and then, perhaps, when they were

trying by lies upon lies to keep her from grasping the truth, his heart felt a pang of pity, and the whole of his vast fortune was left to her.

He did not think that so soon his lawyer would have to deal with his last request; but, with an eye to the future and a vivid memory of his own life, he carefully set forth that every farthing should go to the girl.

Alfred Brand never felt at ease with this acute legal man of the world, who rejected all his advances, and treated him with freezing reserve and but half-disguised contempt, which he feared to resent; and therefore his manner was always a little less jaunty, his tone a little less aggressive, when he entered the solicitor's office.

"A sad thing, a terrible thing, this loss of our mutual friend," he remarked, gazing into the face of the lawyer, after the first brief interchange of formalities was over.

"Very sad," Mr. Crisp snapped, "What is your business?"

"I was thinking of his will."

"Precisely; I thought that must be your errand."

"You misjudge me," Alfred Brand murmured suavely. "I was thinking——"

"It does not matter what you were thinking, Mr. Brand, or what I am thinking. Our late client left a will, and as I drew it myself you may be satisfied that everything is in proper form."

"Of course, you know she's not his daughter."

"What I know, Mr. Brand, is wholly my own business. I never gave you credit for a conscience, or even a single grain of honesty, but I did give you credit for common-sense; and to attempt to worm my late client's intentions out of me shows you do not possess even that."

Alfred Brand rose with a start to expostulate; but with a gesture the lawyer silenced him and turned to his safe.

"You came for information, Mr. Brand," he exclaimed icily, "and

I have it for you. With his will Mr. Harrington left a letter, to be delivered to you after his death. That letter I will give to you, and request you to open and read it outside my office. Here it is. Good-day."

Without a word of reply, the man took the letter and walked out into the street. He looked at the familiar handwriting upon the envelope, and then, with a scowl, and filled with wonder as to what was written within, he tore it open and unfolded the sheets.

There was no form of address. The letter commenced at once—

"I curse the day I first met you, Alfred Brand, for you have been a devil, forcing me to sins which I had not dared to take upon my soul save that you drove me to them."

"You were too great a coward," the man cried fiercely, and turned to the letter again.

"For years you have threatened and blackmailed me, lived on my fortune, and sucked my blood; and now it is all over. Stephen Harrington is dead, and I doubt not that you have plans for forcing more from those to whom his money has gone."

It was so exactly the truth, that Brand raised his eyebrows and pursed his lips as he turned the sheet.

"That is where I thwart you, and gain my revenge. I leave it all to my adopted daughter. I fancy I can see your smile as you think of what an easy fortune lies within your grasp; but you're wrong, you'll never touch a penny more. I leave it to wholly revert to her when she marries. Up to that date she gets five hundred pounds a year. My estate is worth between two and three millions. I've lied to you, Alfred, for years past. Then there's the Golden River—all to her, and you cannot touch a

D

farthing of it. It goes wholly to her when she marries. Bleed her husband, Alfred Brand, bleed him if you can."

Alfred Brand carefully folded the letter, placed it in his pocket-book, and walked slowly westwards. For a moment Stephen Harrington's revenge had a numbing effect, and he could only think of the five hundred thousand pounds which he had believed he had within his grasp, and which now had vanished.

Vanished completely. He might threaten and storm as he would, but it was locked up absolutely. He could not touch it until she married; and even then he would be helpless, for he could not expect her to buy his secret concerning Ralph Chesleigh if she had married another man.

He paused for a second and looked thoughtfully into a shop window, although his thoughts were far away, scheming how he might yet gain the money.

Ralph had killed Stephen and had disappeared. If he could find Ralph, and see them married, thereby releasing the fortune, was his hold strong enough to demand the price?

It was a new idea. He moved onwards again, turning it over and over in his mind.

Ralph had fled. If he could find him, and assure him of his good intentions! Yes, it seemed an excellent plan, if he could find him; but where?

London was too big, too vast, to expect to find a man who was hiding himself from justice. For all he knew, Ralph had fled the country altogether, and by now was on the way to South America.

The shout of a newsboy struck upon his ear—one of those wild yells which announce that something of more than ordinary interest is on sale; and the boy came running towards him, a bundle of papers flung over his shoulder and

a placard with staring type clinging about his knees—

"CLUB TO THE MILLIONAIRE'S MURDERER."

In a second Alfred Brand had bought a paper, and turned to the stop-press column.

"We learn from a semi-official source that the police are following an important clue. Several people testify to having seen on the night of the murder two men, one a rough, seafaring man, and the other well dressed, rushing through Burnsleigh Square. These are doubtless the murderers, and arrests are hourly expected."

Brand read the paragraph two or three times, and then he gave a slight whistle.

His brain, so used to putting this and that together, was already solving the problem.

"Battent!" he exclaimed presently. "Battent and Chesleigh. Two of them there, and——"

He slowly continued his walk.

"That particularly ghastly murderer smells more of Battent than Chesleigh. Ralph chased him, and he either got rid of him as well, or he's got him hidden away. Hum! If I play the deliverer, and free Ralph Chesleigh, where do I stand? I can't blackmail him, because I guess he'd be the first to defy me—he's so different from foxy Stephen. Still, as the one who freed him, the converted sinner who, having seen the error of his way, searches him out and restores him to the girl he loves—how much to me? Forgiveness for past misdeeds, and an annuity of one hundred per annum to lead an honest life. And then the little she-devil would tell him if I tried to get half a million out of her.

"No, Ralph; I've thought it through carefully, and you stop where you are. As for you, Joe, I rather think you're decidedly useful."

He quickened his pace, as his brain moved more freely, and then

suddenly a wild look of satisfied triumph burst over his features.

"By God, Stephen!" he muttered, with an ugly grin, "it's time you started turning in your grave, for if ever a blind old idiot overreached himself, you've done it. You think you've absolutely protected her from me! Oh, Steve, what a fool you lived, and what a fool you died!"

The discovery that, in all probability, Ralph Chesleigh did not commit the murder had been something in the nature of a surprise to Alfred Brand; but now he began to think the second position was just as good as the first, and perhaps might lead to something better. Anyhow, in spite of Stephen Harrington's will, he was determined to have half of the money.

Ralph dead was just as good for his new plan as Ralph living; but it was absolutely necessary that he should know which was the case, or at the last moment he might appear, and spoil the most carefully laid plans.

Joe Battent had naturally kept from Brand the fact that he had found Harrington useful, and hence it was to Limehouse, and not to the gambling den, that he at once made his way; and there, in spite of the hue and cry, he found the millionaire's murderer.

For Battent the opium smoking, gambling and drinking of his former haunts had proved too strong an attraction, and while there was a penny left of his money he had not the power or desire to quit his old resorts. Surrounded by a crowd who flattered and acclaimed him, by reason of what seemed to them his unlimited supply of cash, he lived a roystering, reckless life—a king amongst a dissolute and vicious set of scoundrels.

Many of those who slapped him on the back and called him "Joe" suspected him, and all would have sold him for a five-pound note had one been offered.

It was into this crowd that Alfred Brand quietly stepped, without a nervous tremor.

Joe Battent was sitting at the head of a table covered with brandy bottles, full and empty, and the atmosphere reeked with stale tobacco smoke and dirty stuffiness.

Joe had evidently just finished a recital of some kind, for the room rang with boisterous laughter, and his fawning admirers fought to clap him upon the back, and then turned with renewed energy to their drink.

What a life it was for them, nothing to do but continually drink at another man's expense and roar with laughter at his stories of sickening cowardice or revolting debauchery!

"Boys, I'm a bit of a devil——"

A slight cough interrupted Joe, and with a start he turned and faced Alfred Brand.

His companions rose too; they were all more or less "wanted," and, being ten to one, were full of bravery.

"Keep your seats," Brand remarked quickly; "don't make any rushes at me, or I'll drop half a dozen of you in your tracks. Now, then, Battent, tell them I'm all right."

"Absolutely all right, boys," Joe answered; "it's a personal friend of mine, Mister Brand—given me many little jobs in my time. Keep yourselves quiet, lads, he's no 'tec'; I could put him away myself if I liked."

The men sank back in their chairs, quite satisfied; while Alfred Brand's lips grew a trifle thinner at the covert threat, and he registered something in his mind that boded ill for Joe Battent.

"Well, Brand," the man continued in drunken affability, "what is it to-day? 'Nother bit of kidnapping, eh?"

The crowd had evidently been regaled with the story of the *Deliverance*, for the sally was received with a shriek of laughter.

408150

"I want to speak to you, Battent."

"Speak away; no secrets from my friends."

"I want to speak to you alone."

"Then you can go to the devil and wait for me," Battent shouted, banging his fist down upon the table, and his quarrelsome drunkenness turning to blind passion. "Who are you to come talking to me? For the price of a drink I'd break you in two' over my knee, you cussed little dandified whipper-snapper!"

He made to rise, but Alfred Brand placed his hand upon his shoulder, and forced him back.

"If you don't mind what you're talking about, I'll have you scragged. Now, stop your blustering, and come out."

Without another word, and with all the Dutch courage knocked out of him, Joe Battent rose from the table, and followed Brand into the street.

"Now, look here, Mr. Brand," he said in a hoarse wheedling tone as they got outside; "fair's fair, you know. I've been in a few risky things, but I ain't done no murder, and they can only scrag me for that."

"Don't be a liar; you murdered Stephen."

"Murdered old Harrington! May I drop down dead, Mister Brand——"

"Keep your blasphemous tongue still. I didn't come here to talk all night, or to get you into trouble, if you'll behave yourself; but if I catch you spouting as you were just now, you're a dead man."

"I'm sorry, Mister——"

"I don't want your sorrow, curse you. Listen to me. After you killed Stephen, that infernal Ralph Chesleigh, the man you were to drown and bungled over it, you fool, followed you. Where is he? That's what I want to know. Where is he?"

"He's all right, Mr. Brand," Joe answered with a ferocious gleam in

his eyes. "He's all right, bet your life on that."

"Dead?"

"Not yet."

"Safe?"

"Safe as houses, with friends of mine who ain't too pertickler at times."

"Ah! Well, I'll look after him myself. You've bungled things too much already. Now, remember this, you're not to leave this place, and you're to keep your tongue still. Give me the address. All right. Now, remember, good-night."

He walked a couple of steps, and then turned and looked back upon Joe Battent, who stood with his face distorted with rage.

"Come here," he said; and the man followed the beckoning of his finger.

"Don't play any games with me. Don't give any of your good-tempered friends a dollar to hit me on the head; for it's all written, and if you do it's simply buying the rope to hang yourself with. Good-night."

CHAPTER XXVII

ALFRED BRAND TRIUMPHS

It was well into the night before Alfred Brand reached the gambling den where Ralph still lay imprisoned, and in a few moments he was standing face to face with the man who was now the proprietor of the place.

The message that he came from Battent had gained his admittance; but Joe's friend, an equal scoundrel with himself, still eyed him with considerable suspicion, which Brand, excellent judge of the worst part of human nature as he was, was quick to perceive.

"You needn't stare at me so suspiciously," he remarked. "It's obvious I've nothing to do with the police, or I shouldn't have come from Battent. I want to talk to you for a few minutes. Send

some one out for a bottle of champagne, and we'll split it."

"I can sell you that."

"Dare say you can, my friend, but as I don't want to be mad drunk on one glass I'd rather have an ordinary kind. There, don't scowl; I've come to put money in your pocket. Spend a bit now."

"I don't want no more money and no more jobs of Battent's, curse him. He's put me in a damned hole already."

"Ah, the man upstairs."

"What do you mean? It's a lie. There's no man upstairs."

"Don't be a fool. Where can we talk business?"

"In here," the fellow answered hesitatingly, turning towards a small room adjoining the common one where the gaming and drinking were just getting into swing for the night.

"Here, Tom," he continued, turning to a besotted man standing by the door, "just get the gentleman a bottle of champagne, he doesn't like our liquors."

"And don't play any infernal tricks, Tom," Brand mildly interjected, "I know champagne when I taste it; and if it's bad I'll knock the top of your head off."

With a drunken grin the man took the money, and Alfred Brand followed the keeper of the den into his private room.

"That lie about a man upstairs," he commenced again; but Alfred stopped him with a gesture.

"Have a drink first; I've come to talk business, not damned nonsense."

They waited until Tom had returned with the wine and gone again; and then, both emptying their glasses with a gulp, faced one another and waited.

"You're not starving him, I suppose?" Brand remarked, looking into the man's face.

"I tell you it's all lies, don't I?" he answered fiercely.

"Because starving him would be unwise. Battent did you a nasty

turn. He sold you the crib with a man in it. You can't let that man go, or he'd fetch the police round your ears in two minutes."

"Curse him!"

"You can't kill him, you can't starve him; and so he is really taking money out of your pocket."

"We don't overfeed him," the man muttered with a hoarse chuckle. "Bread and water, and not much of either."

"But it's money out of your pocket, and that's not right. That's the business I've come to talk about. You ought not to have to keep and feed Battent's enemies, and I propose to pay you ten pounds a week for the man's board and lodging."

"Wot's yer game?"

Brand lighted a cigar before he answered, and passed his case to his companion.

"Wot's yer game?" the man queried again between puffs of smoke. "I ain't on for murdering no one. I'd let the poor wretch go terday, only he'd bring round the p'lice and spoil me business."

"I've asked you to murder no one, my dear sir," Brand answered softly. "Simply to accept ten pounds a week for a time, to pay for his board and lodging. You need not alter his food or his apartments."

"I shouldn't give him partridges and fizz," the man answered with a chuckle.

"Of course not. Here's the first tenner. I want you to do no more than you are doing already. Take it or leave it, I don't care; I want the man detained, and you dare not let him go. I'm paying you simply out of generosity."

The man took the note and stuffed it in his pocket.

"All right," he said, "let it go at that."

"A tenner as long as you've got him safe."

"Right."

"And, if I were you, in a week or so I should let him escape."

"How can I? I haven't made my money out of the crib yet, and when he goes I must clear."

"Just so; but I mean this way. Leave him bound rather loosely one night, but don't forget to lock the door. He gets free and goes to the window. Say it's the top floor. The only method of escape would be by the leads. He'd have to draw himself on to the roof by the coping or the gutter. These are old houses—if that gutter or stonework happened to be shaky!—I'd buy your lease for a thousand. Don't say anything, don't answer. Think it over. Let's see the man."

Brand rose from his seat, and with a nod of understanding his companion rose also, and, taking a candle, preceded him up the staircase.

He paused before a door on the top floor and unlocked it.

Alfred Brand did not know exactly why he wanted to see Ralph; he was merely putting his thoughts together, and wondering if a policy safer to his own skin, and less awkward to carry out than the one he had previously arrived at, could not be adopted—one that would give him what he wanted without risk.

Ralph Chesleigh turned as he entered, and even Brand started at the change which had come over him.

He lay bound where he had been flung, and his face showed, in its whiteness and deeply marked lines, the terrible physical and mental sufferings that each day had brought him.

Even to Alfred Brand it seemed impossible that this forcible imprisonment and ill-treatment could be taking place in the very heart of London, almost within hearing of the roar of the traffic of the main streets. Yet, here he was, and here he might die. As it happened he was unknown, and even if he had been well known it would only have been another addition to London's vast catalogue of mysterious disappearances.

"You can go," Brand exclaimed. "I'll call you when I want you."

As the door closed he took a seat upon a rickety chair and calmly surveyed the man upon the floor.

"Now I understand," Ralph exclaimed faintly. "You are at the bottom of my imprisonment."

"You're altogether wrong," Brand answered, calmly puffing at his cigar.

"It's you who instigated the murder of Harrington, with the aid of your miserable harpy Battent; but they cannot imprison a man in London forever, and the time will come when I shall be free and see you both tried for his murder."

"Will you have a cigar? No? Well, I'll tell you one thing that will interest you: there's a hue and cry after Harrington's murderer—and—the description is yours."

"Mine!" Ralph gasped, involuntarily stung into taking interest in what was said.

"Exactly. In Stephen's room they found a manuscript in which you set forth your reasons and desires for revenge, and the whole world believes you, and you alone, to be the murderer."

"It's impossible, it's barbarous!"

"Just so; but it may help you to bear your imprisonment with more patience."

"Why are you here?"

"On your behalf and my own. I'm going to make you an offer. I'm not a man who pretends to do anything for nothing. I have no sentiments; I do what I do for money."

"I want to hear nothing of your plans and proposals. I know you for what you are—an utter scoundrel, a murderer in intent, an accessory before the fact to the murder of Stephen."

"All nonsense; I am the last man in the world who wished him dead. What will you pay for the restoration of the documents which practically prove you to be the murderer? What will you pay for your freedom, and, as a natural

consequence, the girl you wish to marry?"

"Nothing."

"You're mad. Think it over."

"They cannot keep me here for ever. I'll wait, and then look to yourself."

"They can keep you here till the crack of doom. No one knows who you are or what you are. They're scouring England for a man like you. I can smuggle you out. Buy your freedom for the price I ask, half a million. You can afford it. You're going to marry the girl; and she's got millions, all Harrington's money. Don't be a fool. Buy it."

"No, I tell you," Ralph cried fiercely. "No, no, no! Not a penny, whatever happens. It's you I've got a score against, and you I'll repay when I am out of this—you, who prove yourself a liar in every word—you, who have tried to murder her and me. Do you think I would make any terms with you? No, by God, not if I stay here until I rot! Not if you paid me the money, instead of demanding it, would I accept my freedom at your hands. You talk to me of my being suspected and searched for. The first thing I shall do is to lay information against the pair of you—you and Eattent. You're a liar, and a bad liar at that. You tell me the police have my papers, and with the same breath offer to sell them back to me. You've got my answer; take it and go. Do you think I am made of such stuff as to be starved to death in a London garret without a shot for freedom? I've been in worse fixes than this, and I shall be free again yet. Then we shall be man to man, and I'll hound you through the world before you shall escape."

"That's your answer?"

"That's my answer, and you know me—You coward. You dared not have struck me unless I had been bound. Untie me, and see then."

"I could shoot you like a dog,

and get rid of you from here without a soul dreaming of it."

"You don't frighten me with threats. I thank the God who made me that he put a man's heart and a man's soul within me, a presentiment that right must triumph, that we shall meet yet face to face on fairer ground."

Alfred Brand, livid with rage, stood looking down upon the man who openly defied him and so strongly spoke of the future; and then his lips tightened, and a more vicious gleam came into his eyes.

"If you're going to escape," he said, with a cold sneer, "you'd better escape quickly. There's a woman you're nursing to your soul."

"Keep her name from your lips, you cur."

"You've rejected my offers, and now I take my own course. Before a week is out she will be my wife."

"You are becoming more of a fool than a rogue now," Ralph cried scornfully.

"If you have not broken free in twenty-four hours, you will be too late. Think it over, you young fool, in the long night before you. Phyllis, the divine, the innocent, the idol of your soul, will be married to me. Remember, I swear it. Think it well over, and get free if you can."

He passed out, locked the door behind him; and the man met him on the landing, and lighted his way down the grimy staircase. Alfred Brand, paused once in the descent and placed his hand upon his companion's arm.

"I bid five thousand, instead of one, for your lease," he whispered.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

Two passions now raged in Alfred Brand's heart, and he scarcely knew which was the stronger. There was the old lust for money, which had swayed his whole soul and

confined his miserable life to that field of rascality which afforded the swifter methods of gaining it; and then there was a new feeling, a new longing, which seemed to be fiercer than even the old greed, and carried him before it.

There was a frenzy, almost amounting to madness, in his heart to touch this man in the only spot where he could touch him. He had laughed at death, scoffed at threats, and defied Brand to do his worst.

That worst might be so much, too—so much to satisfy his desires. If he could force Phyllis into marrying him, if he could persuade her that she must sacrifice herself for the sake of the man she loved, then both his ambitions would be satisfied together.

He would deal his most vicious blow at Ralph, and gain a control, a share, far beyond the small amount that he had asked, of the fortune that Stephen Harrington left behind him. But was his position strong enough to compel her to take such a step? He knew her. He knew he was not dealing with a weak fool, whom he could bend whichever way he chose; but he knew, too, she was one who would accept her martyrdom for the sake of the man she loved.

He need only make the position stronger still, need only give the screw another turn, he told himself, and went down to Limehouse.

It was only a sleep of an hour or two that he took that night, and yet the morning sunlight found but very little difference in his appearance when he sat with Judith, and placed the position of his plans before her.

With their heads close together, and their voices hushed to a whisper, they discussed everything; and the fierce opposition that was in her face at first faded to acquiescence as her cupidity was aroused, and she learned the share of the plunder with which she would be rewarded.

They settled it together. No power on earth should be spared. Forty-eight hours should see the whole scheme completed; and then Ralph, alive or dead, imprisoned or free, would trouble them no more. Once tie Phyllis to Brand, and then all would be secure; for her sake he must be silent. He could not drag her name through the mud; and, as Alfred Brand remarked, Harrington's fortune could be safely left to himself to deal with.

They were talking at Brand's chambers, and it was Reginald who interrupted them with a note from Phyllis, asking Alfred Brand to come to her at once.

The two men left together, Reginald in a flutter of nervous fear, for he was stirring his halting courage up to the point of attacking Brand, and the latter confident and smiling, because the first shot had told even more quickly and more deadly than he had dared to hope.

"Look here, Brand," Reginald jerked, as they walked along together, "about that conversation we had just before——"

"Why talk about it?" Brand interrupted, linking his arm in the younger man's. "Stephen did some queer things—queer is a nice word to use. But he is dead, so let us say no more. Poor Stephen!" he sighed, "he's dead now, and the past with him. He was my partner and my friend, and I was bound to help him——"

"But——" Reginald got no further. He was too astounded. He had started what he told himself was going to be a row, and there seemed nothing left to say.

He had the feeling of an honest man that things were all wrong; but his was not a fighting character, and Brand's lying tongue non-plussed him.

"Of course her ideas of Ralph were all right," Brand continued slowly. "Stephen tried to deceive her. Ralph came back to Stephen that night——"

"Then he——"

"Say no more about it. Reginald, say no more. Ralph, whatever he did, was provoked! Think of the present only. She is young, Reginald, she's fond of you. Eh? She'll forget—why not?"

The man did not answer, he only walked along, with some foolish, impossible dream in his mind; and Alfred Brand softly whistled, as he thought that one fool more had been gulled, and many would have a rude awakening.

Phyllis was ready to receive him, looking a little more careworn, a little more weary, and striving to hide from him the agonies which she endured, the loathing that came over her at the sight of his face.

"I sent for you," she said scornfully, "because I know a blackmailer can best deal with one of his class."

"Well?"

"I received this letter by post this morning," she continued, and she handed to him a letter that Joe Battent had written from Brand's dictation on the previous night, dated from Limehouse. Written on rough, common paper, full of erasures and smudges, it was scarcely readable; but the man knew it so well that he gave only time enough to pretend to grasp it, and then read it half aloud.

"DEAR MISS,—Being a poor man, and you a rich woman, perhaps you'd like to buy a little information. I was one of the sailors on the ship that you and your lover were sent away on by the late Mr. Harrington. I saw your lover kill him, and I know where he's hiding. Being a poor man, and you a rich woman, perhaps you'd like to pay me not to say anything. What's a thousand or so, say five, to you? Write to the above address strictly on the quiet, and you can rely on me.

"Your obedient servant,

"JOE BATTENT."

"What do you want me to do?"

"To go to this man, and tell him that if he was on the *Deliverance* he was party to the conspiracy to my attempted murder, and dare him to open his mouth."

Her remark was a facer for Brand. A terrible fear came over him that he had over-reached himself, and he kept his eyes turned from her while he thought what he should do. He, too, was a party to that. Suppose she should openly defy them all, what then?

"You're talking nonsense," he said sharply. "You might say the same of me."

"And suppose I did?"

"Then I should answer that you've got to prove it all; but whether you do or not this lover of yours shall hang. Every jot of evidence you bring against me for what happened on the *Deliverance* builds a more damaging conviction against him, shows more clearly his thirst for vengeance, and why he killed Stephen."

"I'll pay it," she murmured faintly, as the truth of what he said came to her mind. "I'll pay it; but, for the love of God, don't torture me more. I can't bear it."

Unable to restrain herself further, she flung her head forward upon the cushion of the settee upon which she sat, and burst into a passionate flood of tears, which seemed almost to choke her; and then the light of triumph shone fiercely in Alfred Brand's eyes. He knew what it meant. He knew how she had steeled herself against him; but now he had conquered. All was over, he had broken her.

He had broken her spirit. He would marry her and break her heart, and then—well, as a disease a broken heart was not accepted in the pharmacopœia, but women had died of it.

"What do you want?" she sobbed hysterically. "Tell me, tell me; take all I have, take every penny, I'll give it willingly. Take

the money. Oh! Ralph, why couldn't we know when we were happy?"

Then, with the tears still wet upon her cheeks, tears that she held no shame to show, she lifted her head and faced him.

"You say you know where he is," she said, her hand pressed upon her breast. "You ask for but a part of what I have. Take me to him, take me to him now, and you shall have every farthing, and not a word shall ever be said against you. Take me to him, and I'll give you my all, and thank you."

There was a burst of longing, a wealth of love and yearning, in her voice that would have made any man save this scoundrel her most willing slave; but he only inwardly cursed the will of Stephen Harrington, which made it impossible for him to take her at her word.

"Will you do it?" she pleaded again, rising from her seat. "There shall be nothing said against you, or the part you have taken; you shall have all, if you will give Ralph back to me."

"Sit down," he viciously ejaculated; "stop these heroics, you don't know what you're talking about. Have you seen Stephen's lawyers?"

"No, I have been too worried—too ill."

"Then I'll tell you what they would have told you. You've nothing to give, you're a pauper, save for a beggarly five hundred a year."

"But it is all mine; Ralph has told me so. It was stolen from me."

"Under Harrington's will you get five hundred a year until you marry, and then the fortune comes to you in bulk. Until that day you are practically a pauper. Now, what becomes of your schemes to save your lover's neck?"

"I will pay you when I can."

"And I don't intend to wait. If I have not got the money in twenty-four hours, I shall send the

papers and give my evidence to the police; and that, with what Battent knows, and what you yourself know, and dare not on your oath hold back, will send him to the gallows."

She looked into his face, and her limbs trembled, her drawn cheeks grew paler still, as she divined some hidden meaning in his tone, some unknown horror that she could not yet realize.

"You know I am helpless," she murmured weakly. "I would do anything on earth to save him, pay anything; but I am helpless."

He rose, and placed his hand upon her shoulder; and she shivered, and drew herself away from him.

"You are helpless, and for my purposes penniless, except you do one thing, marry."

It came as a dead blow upon her; she could not realize anything, save the thought that she must, as he had said, marry some one in order to get the money to buy the life of the man she loved. A dull thought came to her too, that Ralph would rather die than she should sell herself to save his life.

But it was only a dull thought, without any responsive glow in her heart. Ralph need not know. She would write and tell him that she had changed, and then—well, it didn't matter what happened then. She would pay the money and destroy the papers. Ralph would think of her as heartless, and, returning to Santa Teresa, where there were friends in whose honesty he could believe—forget her.

"Yes, I must marry," she said coldly. So coldly that he started at the utter lack of life in her tone. "You must know some one who can be bought, as all of you seem able to be; some one who will marry me, and give me the power to save Ralph's life, and then leave me for ever. It must be upon those terms, even for Ralph. I can accept no others."

"It is not for you to dictate or

object," Brand incisively retorted. "I know a man who will marry you, and that is sufficient for you."

"The man must know my terms," she answered, for her thoughts had flown to Reginald. "I will not have him think he has a wife in anything but name——"

"He knows your terms, your secrets, and your life. No other man but myself shall come into this compact. Make what terms you like, you must marry me."

"You!" she whispered in horror, with her arms flung out, as though to keep him from her, "you!"

"Yes, I. Do you think I am going to have another man with his grasp upon your money? Do you think I am going to be content now with a trifle of what you own? You know my terms, and I give you until to-morrow morning to make up your mind."

"I cannot do it," she answered weakly, "not even for Ralph. I cannot bear the contempt he will have for me when he knows I have married you."

"Until to-morrow morning," he sharply cried again. "You understand me well; I shall come to you again then, and your answer frees Ralph Chesleigh or seals his doom."

He took his hat and walked towards the door. "Don't forget, Marry me, or with your own hands put the rope round his neck," he cried, and turning upon his heel left her.

In a clinging dream of horror Phyllis watched Alfred Brand as he passed from the room, and then, as the loathsomeness of the task she must undertake came full upon her, her lips moved faintly, and with a moan she fell forward upon the carpet, to awaken later to a consciousness which was torture, and to find Judith bathing her forehead.

She moaned again as the past came back to her, and Judith spoke in her domineering voice.

"What has my cousin been saying to you to cause this?"

"Speaking of things which frightened me," she murmured faintly.

"The murder, I suppose," Judith answered slowly. "Well, we all know who did it. I told you on the night. But what's it matter? So long as they don't get hold of me, and put me on my oath, I shan't talk. You've got plenty; only give me enough to settle me for life out of England, and they can get nothing out of me. I'll stick to you, and so will Alfred, if you pay us."

It was another move in Brand's carefully arranged scheme, to drive her where he had sworn she should go.

Every one cried "Money!" and there was but one way to gain it.

Wearily she turned upon her side, and the thought came to her, when she remembered that she had but till the morning to decide, that so many a poor wretch must lie when he knew the dawn would end all things for him.

"Good God!" so might Ralph lie counting the minutes of his life, if she held back and would not yield to save him.

CHAPTER XXIX

PHYLLIS CONSENTS

THE morning broke, and Phyllis watched the first faint flush of the dawn as it grew in the greyish sky.

The night had been one of horror to her, in which each minute brought her nearer to the hour she loathed, to the act she felt she must take, yet death itself would be better.

Huddled in the corner of a chair thinking what she should do, and then upon her knees praying for guidance, or slowly walking her room from end to end, the long hours of the night had passed.

The morning broke, and, calmer but still perplexed to madness, she looked from her window upon the

world awakening to life ; and as she did so the torture of her mind passed away, and clearly she saw things as they were, and in a second fixed immovably the path that she would take.

Alfred Brand was right when in carefully arranging his diabolical schemes he thought that in her lay the self-sacrifice of a martyr ; perhaps he had seen it in the depths of her eyes, for no one was a better judge of men and women than he. And he had judged her aright, for as the sun rose higher and threw its first beams into her room they fell upon her face, framing it in an aureole of glory, and it was the face of one resolved, pale with the tortures of the night, but now fixed with her purpose ; and her eyes shone with unnatural brilliancy as she decided, for Ralph's sake, for the sake of the man she loved, she would give way in all things. She would accept Brand's infamous proposal, and Ralph should be free—free to hold her in everlasting scorn, not knowing what she had sacrificed for him.

It was the thought of his contempt for her that became her greatest and most terrible anguish, but there could be no half measures. He could never know the truth, and so she must give up all for him, knowing that as her reward she could but have his scorn and his contempt.

Judith found her pale yet self-possessed ; there was not a tremor in her voice as she said she would see Alfred Brand directly he arrived, and any one but a woman whose soul was dead to all human instinct, would have flung everything upon one side, and helped her in her dire struggle against the man who now controlled her destiny.

She met Brand in the same room as the day before, when he had forced his purposes upon her ; but very different in her manner, for the hysteria had passed away and she was now cold and dispassionate. She was bartering her life for the

sake of that of the man she loved, and her love for Ralph warned her not to be tricked into an empty bargain.

He sat looking into her face, and his crafty eyes gleamed just a shade more steely as he saw that he had gained his ends.

Even Alfred Brand, a man in whom all knowledge of good had been crushed years back, knew the expression in the face of a woman who had decided that she would sacrifice herself.

"I have well considered all that you told me," she said coldly, "and I consent."

"To become my wife ?"

"To go through a form of marriage with you, and so secure the fortune to buy you."

"It is the same."

"It is not. No, not even for Ralph."

"What do you mean ?"

"This," she answered, and her voice became less weary as she spoke, "when the service is over we separate for ever. You shall have all you want, but I will never look upon you again. You shall have one half of what is mine now and in the future. Those are my terms, those and no others."

"And suppose I decline them ? Suppose I refuse this dramatic farce of a wedding ?"

"Then do what you will. I will go no further. Not even to save his life."

"And the papers ?"

"You will give them to some one, some one I can trust—we will say Reginald—and he will destroy them directly the mockery is over and my fortune is my own."

"A pretty game," Brand sneered, "you have not wasted the hours of the night. Give you my evidence, you get your fortune ; and then it is within your power to refuse me a penny. No, my girl, you'll have to think of something better than that before you catch me."

"What a poor fool you are," she cried contemptuously, "what a

poor, cunning, contemptuous fool. I promise to give you half of all."

"I never deal in promises."

"On condition that you leave me for ever. I know your power under the law to compel me to recognize the rights I shall have given you—to become your wife. I will pay you half of all I have because I will not."

Brand nodded his head. Even to him it began to be clear that his share was safe. He had no fine instincts, but he quite realized that the girl would keep her part of the bargain.

"I think I might agree," he said slowly, very slowly, because he was still racking his brain to see if there were not some pitfall which might lead to his disaster.

"The minor blackmailer I will leave to you," she answered. "You'll free me from him in writing."

Brand shook his head.

"You won't get any writing from me, my dear."

"You think I am striving to get you to incriminate yourself," she answered scornfully. "You think I am as great a trickster as yourself; you've lived so long in crime you cannot recognize honesty. You've forced me where I am, and I accept; but, when you have half of all, there shall be no smaller blackmailers to bleed me further still. You will simply write a few words engaging yourself to satisfy the claims of the man Battent against your wife."

"Yes, I'll go as far as that."

"Then we understand one another. Fix the mockery for when you choose. Reginald must be there, and to him you will give the papers. Immediately after, you leave me, and receive half of everything I have."

"And everything to come."

"Yes, and everything to come," she answered scornfully; "and now lift your crafty eyes to mine, listen to what I say, and see if you

can recognize truth when you meet it."

He slowly raised his eyes and looked into hers, which gazed so contemptuously upon him that even he shifted uneasily.

"Money is your god," she said, "and I know it. Now mark what I say. On the day you break our compact, the moment you strive to enforce the rights the law gives you, I make a deed of gift of my whole fortune, present and to come, to charities."

"Quite a windfall for the hospitals," he answered with an attempt at bravado.

"Look into my eyes, Alfred Brand; you'll understand me better then."

He raised his eyes once more.

"Can you read me a little?" she said slowly. "If you make one false move you lose all. Yes, and lose me too. For rather death than you. Now you can make all arrangements, for we understand one another."

He rose, and without a word walked towards the door.

"Stop! Come here."

Mechanically he walked back and faced her once again.

"Not a church," she said, "it's simply a matter of law; I'll not profane a church."

"As you will, but a church is so respectable," he answered with a sneer.

"Good-day. Tell me when and where after you have arranged it."

The die was cast now; Phyllis had taken the irrevocable step, and as Alfred Brand left her her heart became, if anything, a trifle lighter.

After what had happened, she told herself, she could never have been Ralph's wife, and that being so it was better that she entered into this compact and so saved his life.

Her love for him seemed almost to have departed in the deadness of what had happened; it was now a deep and intense compassion. She must sacrifice all for him, and she had done so.

In response to an urgent message Reginald came to her, and so unmoved was her heart to all feeling of sympathy that, knowing the man worshipped the very ground upon which she stood, she did not attempt to lighten the suddenness of the shock, but the moment the ordinary greetings had passed between them, said, "I am going to be married, Reginald; I thought you would like to be the first to hear the news."

It was only a few hours since Alfred Brand had helped Reginald to still further build his castles in the air, only a few hours since he had said, "Why not, Reginald?" and in those hours again and again the man's mind had asked, "Why not, Reginald? Why not?"

He had come to her filled with hope, because she had sent for him, and surely that must mean something more than mere friendship—and it was for this he had come.

"You don't congratulate me," she said; and then he raised his eyes to hers, and the soul of a good man, a man who was weak by nature, and yet good beyond many who are counted strong, gleamed behind them as he took her hand and answered her.

"But I do, Phyllis," he replied, unconsciously addressing her by the name he had never dared to use before. "I do congratulate you. You are what you always seemed to me you must be—a woman, who, giving her love, gives it for to-day and for ever."

She looked at him wondering, and yet knowing, which way his thoughts were leading him.

"We know how he was provoked," he said slowly, "we know how he has fallen. But it was not murder, only vengeance; and I am glad that you are what I thought you were."

"I do not understand you," she exclaimed after a pause. "You do not even ask whom I am going to marry. It is he, surely, who

must be congratulated," and she laughed so mockingly that he too did not comprehend, and lifted his eyes quickly to hers.

"Who is he?" he cried.

"A mutual friend," she answered, still in that jeering tone, "Alfred Brand."

"Alfred Brand!" he exclaimed in a whisper.

"And why not, Reginald?" she answered fiercely, meeting his reproachful glance.

"You know why not, dear," he answered, tenderly; and years afterwards he used to wonder in his quiet way how he could ever have spoken to her so, and how it was she did not resent it. "You know why not, dear; tell me, what does it mean?"

"What do you mean?" she answered, and then looking into his eyes she began to understand that this man had a second nature hidden beneath his flippant foppery.

She realized in that one glance that he would give his life for her, even if it only meant she was to be another's; and yet knew that in an extremity where action was needed he was useless. To quietly give up all, to sacrifice himself, in almost a dog-like way, he would count as nought; but to fight for her, to stand up against the world for her, was a thing that even he could only dream.

Once he had defied Stephen Harrington and Brand together, but that was when his sluggish blood had been heated to the courage of the moment. To act slowly and determinedly was a trial of strength beyond him.

"What do you mean?" she said again as the pause lengthened; and then she took his hand in hers, "You know I want your help, Reginald."

"Why are you marrying this man when you love another, and loathe the one whose wife you tell me you are to be?" he exclaimed; and then, looking into her eyes, he continued, "you dare not;

Ralph would rather die than buy his life at such a cost."

"You do not understand all," she answered. "It is simply a matter of form, this wedding. To marry, even as only a mockery, gives me control over the fortune which is mine, and with that money I shall buy his life."

CHAPTER XXX

THE IRREVOCABLE STEP

"But there must be some other way," he said. "Believe me, I would do anything in the world to free you. Tell me how I can. I care not what it is, if it is for your happiness."

She placed her hand upon his, and gazed wistfully into his eyes.

"I know you would do anything," she answered, "but there is nothing. Nothing you can do to spare me from the task I have undertaken; but something you can do for me, because you are the only man I can ask who is true."

"Yes," he answered, "I know only too well, I am not strong, but I am true. If I had had more manliness, more strength of will——"

"Don't worry yourself now, Reginald. What is to be must be. Fate guides us all. Why I want you to be my friend now is this. Before I am married to that man, he will give me certain papers; and I want you to promise to destroy them utterly, burn them, so that not a sheet, not a word, shall remain. You will promise me this, Reginald? You will not fail me?"

"I will not fail you," he answered earnestly.

"It is possible Brand may try and regain them."

"He shall not. I promise that, upon my oath."

"Then, that is all, Reginald. It will be one day this week. You will be in readiness, whenever and wherever it is?"

"Yes," he answered gravely, "I will not fail you," and, raising her hand to his lips, he kissed it and left her.

Then she turned to her neglected correspondence, which she had not touched for days past, and opened, first of all, the legal blue envelope from Stephen Harrington's lawyers, which placed the facts before her, that she already knew concerning her inheritance. The others were letters of condolence and friendship, and, having given the morning for replying to them all, she wrote to the lawyers, and asked them to prepare to hand over the whole of the fortune under the will of her guardian within a week; and then rang for Judith.

The old vicious lines of avarice were still in Judith Brand's face. They were the work of years—of a lifetime, and could never be effaced; but with them now was a look of semi-fear. It was not pity, the woman's heart was beyond it. But a look as if she dreaded that Phyllis had been driven too far.

As a woman without soul, without one spark of human feeling, she could not understand the quiet martyrdom of the girl. She lived in dread that this acquiescence was a trick, there was something behind it, some unexpected blow that would be delivered at the last moment, which should destroy them both—Brand and herself.

"What is it, miss?" she asked in a voice that trembled a little because of this unknown dread.

"I have made all arrangements to marry your cousin," Phyllis answered coldly.

"I'm sure he will be a good husband, miss. I'm sure he's fond of you. I am so glad, I am indeed. He has always been devoted to you."

The girl's eyes looked into those of the woman, until a flush came over her sallow features, until her eyes dropped and fixed themselves upon the hands that fidgeted and fumbled with her dress.

"Don't stand there and lie to me," she answered quietly. "You know as well as I it is only a form of marriage that I am going through to gain the power to pay you, and those with you, the blood-money you demand. You know he will be no husband of mine. You know you are in league, and always have been, with him. Be an honest thief. Don't plot and scheme to ruin my life, as you have done, and then say, 'I am sure you will be happy.'"

"But, miss, I——"

The woman's face had faded to a ghastly grey as she stood before the girl who looked so contemptuously upon her.

"I did not ring for you to ask your views upon my future, but simply to give you a message to your cousin. Let him make all arrangements for the day after to-morrow."

"Very well, miss."

"And another thing. I told him I would not be married in a church. I have altered my mind, I will be. In a quiet country church, somewhere out of London."

Judith's dull eyes gleamed for a moment. Perhaps it was here where the danger that she feared lay concealed. Why this sudden change of plans?

"My cousin told me you had stipulated for only a civil marriage," she answered. "Why this alteration?"

"I did do so," Phyllis answered, "but I have changed. When the Church marries she gives a blessing, and I want that blessing. Not upon my marriage, but upon the act that I have taken upon myself to save the man I love. God knows my heart. I want this blessing, His help in the life that is yet before me."

The clock upon the mantelpiece ticked loudly in the dead pause that followed.

"That is all. Tell your cousin."

"Very well, miss." And the woman walked silently away, and as silently closed the door behind

her; while Phyllis wrote to Reginald, telling him there was but one day between the present and the irrevocable step she must take.

* * *

The little village of Babbingsstone glowed with a feeling of subdued excitement. It was only yesterday that they received an immense surprise, when four people drove from the station, and put up for the night at the only inn in the village; but now that surprise had become stupefaction, for it was common knowledge that the strangers were from London, and the young lady was to be married that morning at the church upon the hill.

The sexton had been told the night before, and—well, of course, now the whole world, as represented by that one straggling street and a few outlying farms, were talking of it.

The children were already scattered over the country gathering wild flowers, to sprinkle in the path of the bride. The last wedding in the village was nearly a year ago, but they remembered when Mr. Robbins was married they threw flowers down, and had pennies, and pennies represented sweets, and sweets represented their greatest happiness.

The loungers anticipated, too, for they remembered that when Mr. Robbins was married there were unlimited invitations to drink the health of the bride and bridegroom; and drinking represented their greatest happiness.

So, agog with these and other expectations, the inhabitants gathered round the church, awaiting the carriage slowly climbing the hill.

It stopped at the gate, and Alfred Brand and his cousin alighted, then Reginald, and lastly Phyllis.

Now that the time had come, her face was white and deathlike, and it seemed only by the strength of her will she kept herself from

falling. Her eyes shone with a wild, unnatural brilliancy, and the hand that held her bouquet trembled, until the petals dropped from the flowers in a shower.

It was not the typical bride's bouquet, only a mass of glorious roses which Reginald had given her—given her that morning, with a few words which ended in a choke. He loved her once, but now he worshipped the ground on which she trod.

The four walked to the door of the church, and then Phyllis turned to Alfred Brand.

"You have brought the papers," she said; and for answer he took the envelope from his pocket, and handed it to her.

Before the wondering eyes of that village group, who seemed to be hushed, as though this strange wedding were a tragedy, she took the packet from the envelope, carefully looked through the sheets, saw that each ran on to each, that none had been withdrawn, and handed them to Reginald.

"Remember your promise, Reginald," she said quietly.

"I shall not fail you in this," he answered; and then, placing her hand upon Alfred Brand's arm, she walked with him up the aisle.

Before the alter she swayed, and would have fallen, but Brand placed his arm around her, and she stood trembling there.

"Go on," she whispered, in answer to the puzzled look of the minister, "go on, I am all right now."

He was a young man, the rector of the obscure little village of Babbinstone, a man who, if he could have chosen his fate, would have been one of the Church Militant, fighting the devil for men in the slums and dangerous haunts of some great city, instead of dragging through a slumbrous existence, out of the world, out of life, in a corner of England where vice was so insignificant that it

became a replica of virtue in the busier world.

His kindly grey eyes contradicted his firm mouth, and both conquered his flock in that village out of the world.

Some loved him because of the reproach that could gaze forth from his eyes; some for the sting and determined talk that came from his lips.

Some said, "Parson, 'e do look at ye, 'e do," and others said, "Parson, 'e do talk to ye, 'e do," and so he governed even the most unruly in this little world of his.

As Phyllis whispered, "Go on, go on," he came from behind the rails, and taking her hand in his led her to a seat.

This man of the world saw this was no ordinary wedding, and so he gently led her away from the man who stood beside her.

It was a delay in the ceremony, a delay that meant so much, if she could have known it, if she could have known that Ralph was at that second speeding on to save her.

"She is overwrought," Brand murmured with a slight bow, and not a vestige of anger. "It will pass away."

"You will let me speak with her?" the rector said.

"Assuredly, why not?" he answered smilingly; "but she has had great trouble. Be wise in what you say."

"A rogue," the man thought, as he returned to where Phyllis sat, "a scoundrel; and she submits, and yet loathes what she is doing."

"Why do you let them talk?" Judith whispered icily. "She'll tell everything; you have given up the papers. Oh, you fool, you fool!"

"She will tell nothing," replied that excellent judge of character. "Do not fear for us. She will keep her word."

"Tell me what is wrong," the rector pleaded, as he bent over

the girl. "This marriage is a crime, a sin to yourself, and a slur upon my church."

She gazed into his face, and the tears filled her eyes as she saw the glow of human nature, the sparkle of kindness with which he looked down upon her.

"I know I am young," he said gently, "only perhaps a few years older than you are. But you must not commit this sin against yourself. A woman does not so come to wed the man she loves. Whatever your temptation, put it behind you. Be true to yourself. Be true to the love that every woman has, the love that the Church blesses and sanctifies."

"I am true to that," she said softly. "Do not judge me harshly."

"I do not judge," he answered gravely.

"It is for that true love of which you speak I am here to-day."

"To marry this man?"

"Yes."

There was a silence for a moment, and then she placed her hand upon his.

"If you knew all," she continued, "you would think that perhaps the blessing of the Church might be given to me, if not to my wedding. Try and believe in me. Give me your good thoughts, and go on."

"I cannot force your confidence," he replied; "you are sure you are not mistaken in your sacrifice?"

"I am sure," she answered slowly, and, rising, she walked with him back to the altar; while he, perplexed and wondering, proceeded with the service which made them man and wife.

The ceremony was over, the register signed, and she faced the rector.

"Give me a word," she said softly.

He thought of the many times in that vestry when, with a smile, he had been the first to congratulate the bride, the first to call her

by her new name; and then his eyes moistened a little as he took her hand.

"God bless you," he answered.

Then the organ pealed, the bells rang forth; and they went toward the porch.

The villagers bowed and waved their hats; the children scattered the flowers as she walked; and Alfred Brand handed her into the carriage, and stood beside it.

"It would be madness," he whispered to her, "to separate here. It would attract the attention of the whole of the place. We must drive to the next town."

"Yes, it must be so," she answered, and sank back in the carriage.

Then Alfred Brand returned for a moment to the porch, and took Judith's hand.

"It is all through," he whispered.

"You see I was right. Wear this in memory of the day," and he fastened a jewel around her throat.

The children hovered about the carriage, and then one bolder than the rest came and handed the last bunch of flowers to the girl.

With a sob she took it from her, and then, flinging herself back in her seat, struggled to restrain the agonizing tears that were choking her.

"I've destroyed the papers. They're burnt to ashes."

It was Reginald who spoke, and he leant into the carriage and whispered, "You are not going with him?"

"Only to the next town, Reginald. You see, we cannot part here."

"Yes, I see," he answered.

"Where is he?"

"Coming down now. Good-bye, Phyllis."

"Good-bye, Reginald. The children don't know what a tragedy this wedding is; you'll buy them some toys?"

"Aye, I'll clear out the village shop for them. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, and thank you."

"Good-bye; here he is."

Then the bridegroom sprang into the carriage, and the loiterers cheered, for their anticipations had been more than fulfilled.

One man looked after the carriage with tears in his eyes and a quiver on his face; and another stood in the porch of the church, wondering, and still perplexed.

CHAPTER XXXI

RALPH REGAINS HIS LIBERTY.

It was the night before the day Phyllis was to marry Alfred Brand, and Ralph Chesleigh, little dreaming of the troubles which hung over the woman he loved, lay in the attic above the gambling den and wondered if ever he should be free again.

It was some little time back that he had jeered at Brand and scoffed at the idea of a man being kept a prisoner in the heart of London; and now he was beginning to realize how easy it was, and that he must remain where he was until they chose to release him upon what terms it suited them to dictate.

Gradually his determination was ebbing away as the hours of the long nights and endless days exercised their numbing effects upon the body already enfeebled by the illness from which he suffered in Madeira.

He was weary now and tired of everything, inclined to promise or give anything for freedom.

He rolled uneasily upon his side, striving as he had striven so often to find a better position for his aching limbs, and then his heart seemed almost to stop its beating.

Somewhere the bonds that bound him had loosened, and he tugged furiously at the cord which fastened his hands behind him. It was always so he was tied except when they gave him semi-freedom to take his meagre meals.

Like a thread the cord snapped as he strained at it, and he sat there dazed for the moment at the prospect of freedom which now seemed to lay clear before him.

But his wonderment only lasted for a second, and then feverishly he set to work upon the rope which bound his feet, and stood released.

Free from his bondage, but suffering agonies which almost caused him to faint as he moved his limbs which had been cramped for so long.

The joy of freedom sustained him, however, and he crept to the door and listened. From below came the hum of voices and the continuous rattle of the roulette wheel. The door was locked, and escape that way was impossible. Painfully he crept across the room again and, slowly raising the window, gazed out into the night.

A clock near by struck midnight, and he thought with a growing feeling of elation that in only an hour hence he might be free; and yet as he gazed down it seemed hopeless. Far below he could see a narrow courtyard lighted by a flickering gas jet, but to reach it appeared impossible. There was no water pipe or projection by which he could descend, and nothing in the room with which he could manufacture a rope.

Here was freedom so near, and yet so far from him. He must be saved now; he could call to the first passer-by and urge him to go for the police, for even in this wretched neighbourhood constables must patrol at times. He need only wait, and help must come.

He sat upon the edge of the window-sill, his heart beating wildly as he wondered how long he must yet wait for rescue, wondered whether at any moment he might not be surprised and bound once more.

Still no sound and no passer-by below, and his head grew dizzy as he watched the flickering light in the court beneath.

The inaction was maddening. He could stand it no longer. If escape did not lie below, then perhaps above.

He leaned backwards and glanced up to the parapet of the house. It was a flat roof, and by standing on the sill it looked as if he could reach the gutter, and so drag himself upwards.

In a second he was standing there, but the gutter was still fully six inches above his fingers. It seemed hopeless, and his heart died within him again.

Then something blew across his fingers, and he grasped it wildly. It was a rope dangling from the roof, that must have been left there when some repairs had been going on.

Yet something made him suspicious, for, as it dangled just in front of his face, he could smell the unmistakable odour of new cordage. In a second he had struck a match. The rope was new, white and clean, and he almost lost his balance on the narrow sill as the full truth struck home—his escape was an arranged trick.

A sharp tug brought the rope away, and softly he re-entered the room again. It was a trick—a trick to kill him. They knew below that he was unbound, and they might enter at any moment and find that he had thwarted them.

He leaned far out of the window again. Surely someone must pass along the court in a moment, or was it merely a *cul de sac*?

One o'clock sounded, and he winced a little. Had an hour passed since he had counted freedom his? An hour, and no one had entered the court. Then it must be as he feared, it led nowhere.

He still gazed from the window, and as he did so his breath came quicker. A man was moving quietly up the court, then another, and another and another.

The cry that came to his lips died as he saw they did not walk past, but posted themselves in

various positions in the court. The flickering gas-lamp shone upon their dark-blue helmets, and the man who watched smiled grimly as he realized how opportunely aid had come.

The house was surrounded by a cordon of constables. The gambling den was to be raided by the police, and he was saved.

Fearful of being seen and so disturbing the plans of his rescuers, he drew in and, walking to the door, stood listening.

The hum of voices, now and again broken by a shout or an imprecation, still reached his ears from below, and, knowing what was coming, he waited with a smile upon his lips for the inevitable.

At last it came. There was a sudden crash, a regular tramp of feet in the passage below, a few sharp commanding words, followed by a torrent of international oaths, a scrimmage upon the staircase, the sound of a crashing balustrade, and then silence.

Presently the steady tramp of men grew nearer, he banged fiercely on the panels of the door, and cried aloud for help.

The constables who were on the floor below paused and listened.

"Who's up there? You'd better come down; you can't escape by the roof, the house is surrounded."

They came up the last staircase, and Ralph hammered at the door again.

"Open the door," he cried excitedly, "I'm a prisoner."

"Stand back!"

The man put his shoulder to the door, and the flimsy lock flew off and half across the room.

Ralph blinked hopelessly in the dazzling light from the bull's-eyes.

"What's up? What's it mean?" one asked.

"Or is it a dodge?" another continued, "if so, it won't work."

"It's no dodge," Ralph answered quickly. "I've been im-

"prisoned here for days. Where is your inspector? Take me to him."

The men descended the stairs together and entered the main room, now in possession of the police.

The struggle had been short and decisive, but not altogether bloodless.

One or two were nursing ugly wounds, and the others stood round, dejectedly scowling at their captors.

The tables had been overturned, the greasy cards lay scattered upon the floor, while here and there a broken chair showed that all had not been gained without resistance.

A military-looking official was pacing the floor, and he turned sharply as they entered.

"What's this? Who is he?" he cried sharply. "Where did you find him?"

"Locked in a top room, sir. He says he's a prisoner."

"A prisoner!" he exclaimed, turning to Ralph, "a prisoner! What do you mean? Who are you?"

"My name is Ralph Chesleigh, my address the *Alliance Hotel*," he answered, and handed his card to the inspector. "For days they've held me a prisoner here, bound hand and foot, and locked in the attic where you found me."

"God bless me! Somebody will have to pay for this."

"I have to thank you for my release."

"What was the object—money?"

"It was not wholly that," Ralph commenced; and then he suddenly stopped and pointed excitedly to a man who sat huddled in the corner.

"Arrest that man," he shouted, "Arrest him."

"They're all under arrest."

"Then handcuff him and see that he does not escape, for he is the murderer of Stephen Harrington, the millionaire."

With a cry Joe Battent, for it

was he who had been drawn by Fate to visit the den upon this night, sprang to his feet, and catching up the heavy chair upon which he had been sitting, held it aloft and stood at bay. Then, as half a dozen constables made a rush for him, he hurled it in their midst, overturning several of them like ninepins, and, springing over the straggling heap, violently flung the man aside who caught at him, and dashed out of the room and up the creaking staircase.

In a wild rush they were after him, up, past the door of the attic, and then by a ladder on to the roof of the house.

He tried to fling the trap-door back upon them, but was too late, and they sprang out after him; and there he stood, his back against the low parapet, and jeered them to take him, for now he had drawn his sheath-knife, that same weapon with which he murdered Harrington, and stood awaiting the attack.

For a second they stood irresolute, and then like a flash one of the constables unhooked the heavy rolled cape he had by his side, and flung it with all his force at the man. It struck him full, and then, before he could recover, they were upon him, and half a dozen held him in their grip, bruising his hand against the parapet, until with a yell of rage he dropped his knife, and one of them kicked it to the other side of the roof.

Then, like some brute animal driven mad with pain and rage, he struggled in fury with his assailants, cursing and drawing his breath with choking gasps.

They were all big men, all used to rough-and-tumble fights, but struggling with Battent upon the slippery roof even six to one began to tell upon them, while he seemed to feel no weariness, and fought more fiercely than even at first.

Then at last with one great effort they bore his hands behind him, the handcuff clicked upon one

wrist, and they bore upon the other arm; when like a tiger he wrenched himself free from all, the steel handcuff crashed into the face of one man, leaving his features crushed and bleeding, struck with a dull thud the helmet of another, and Battent darted along the roof, and with a glance down, an oath to his pursuers now but a yard away, he swung himself over and dropped on the sloping top of a building some dozen feet below.

He fell right on to the ridge of the roof and lay there for a second, time enough to yell another curse at those who hung over the parapet above him, and then they saw his hands wildly grasping for some protection upon the slimy slates to save himself.

Wildly grasping, but in vain. He slipped backward, gradually slid over the ridge, feet foremost, and then in a heap he rushed downwards. His feet struck the gutter, and checked his descent for an instant, but the zinc crumbled away at the jerk, and he fell head foremost, with his arms outstretched.

CHAPTER XXXII

FROM LIGHT TO DARKNESS

It was between nine and ten on the same morning that Ralph Chesleigh gained his release that he stood outside Stephen Harrington's house and gazed at the shuttered windows.

He had done everything that lay in his power to aid the police; he had given them all the information that he possessed in regard to Joe Battent, and had promised to attend the necessary inquest on the morrow, for Battent's fall from the roof had caused his instant death. He had further lodged his charge against those who had held him prisoner, and now his first act was to hasten to where he knew he would gain tidings of Phyllis.

For Brand's threats he cared nothing. He had scarcely thought of them since the moment the man left him. But now as he stood outside the house, in which there was no stir of life at this not too early hour of the morning, a feeling of dread came over him as he wondered what had happened.

He viciously pressed the button of the electric bell again, and kept his finger upon it, until a shuffling of feet in the hall told him that some one was moving inside; and then the door was opened, and a sleepy-eyed servant faced him.

In a few seconds all was told.

Miss Harrington—it was still the name by which they knew her—Mr. Brand, and his cousin left London together yesterday, and the man did not know where they had gone or when they would return.

The man scowled in Ralph's face at having been disturbed, edged the door to, and, finding the visitor had no more questions to ask, shut it, and left Ralph upon the door-step, dazed and bewildered. He pressed the bell again; and the door was slowly opened, and the man inclined to be insolent.

"I'll give you ten pounds," Ralph said sharply, "if you find out where they've gone."

The man awakened with a start, but he only mournfully shook his head.

"I'm sorry, sir," he exclaimed, "but I don't know."

"Well, some one must know. Go and ask the other servants. It means ten pounds to you, and as much to any one who can give me a hint."

"None of us know, sir. I give you my word, we've all been talking about it, and wondering why they rushed off so suddenly."

"Twenty pounds," Ralph exclaimed.

The man shook his head again, and smiled. "It isn't a case of bidding high enough, sir," he said. "We don't know, and that's the

truth. It's possible Mrs. Neville-Whyte may know something."

Ralph remembered the name. Phyllis had spoken affectionately about the woman who was once her chaperon.

"Where does she live?" he exclaimed.

"In the square opposite, sir, twenty-seven."

With a word of thanks, he thrust something into the man's hand, dashed down the steps, and in a few moments was clamouring fiercely at the house which had been pointed out to him.

In response to an urgent message written upon his card, Mrs. Neville-Whyte received him, and as she looked inquiringly towards him he realized that the request which he had to make was somewhat peculiar, and in spite of his trouble a slight smile broke upon his lips.

"You will think I am a madman to call at such an hour," he said.

"Do not take up your time," she answered, "with excuses. I can see you are in great trouble; tell me at once, and let me help you, if I can."

"Then tell me where Phyllis has gone," he said, "Phyllis Harrington they call her, the girl whom Stephen Harrington used to pretend was his daughter."

Mrs. Neville-Whyte froze into an air of mere politeness. The man, she judged, was a rejected suitor, and it seemed to her a madman also, to come to her with a statement that Phyllis was not Harrington's daughter. He was a man who was, doubtless, anxious to follow them, and create a scene; and, although the news that Phyllis proposed to marry Alfred Brand once came as a bewildering shock to her, she did not see that anything could be gained by sending this man in pursuit.

"I can tell you nothing," she replied, and gravely shook her head.

"But you know?"

"Yes, I know; but no good purpose can be gained by telling you what they desired to hold secret. You forget, I do not even know who you are, and your request is a strange one."

"But Phyllis has told me of you, told me how good you have been to her in the past: surely, you will not turn away when you could help her."

"It was told to me in confidence, Mr. Chesleigh, and you cannot expect me to break my word. Believe me, I would speak if I could, but she desired that the wedding should be attended by no one."

"What wedding?" he gasped; and his face grew ghastly.

"Her own."

"Good God!" he cried, "you don't mean it. You cannot!" And he stood there swaying from side to side, and gazing in bewilderment before him.

"Who is the man?" he demanded huskily.

"Her father's partner, Mr. Brand."

He reeled as though he had been struck, and then caught at the mantelpiece to steady himself, while his lips moved, and yet no sound came from them.

She walked towards him, and then stopped, gazing with something akin to terror at his face, which twitched like that of one in awful agony.

"God curse him!" he cried, at last, and the words came from him with a shriek. "Curse him! curse him!" he repeated, as a flood of passion swept over him.

"Tell me more," he said fiercely, turning towards her again. "Tell me all. I do not ask it; I demand it. You were her friend, you were the only one she loved. You dare not stand by now, silent, while she is being tricked into this horrible alliance. She loves me, she is my affianced wife, and hates and loathes this man Brand like the hideous crawling wretch he is. It's trickery or force, and must be

stopped. Tell me where and when."

"I believe all you say, Mr. Chesleigh," she answered, with a voice that trembled in sympathy with the man's emotion, "but it is too late."

"Why?"

"The wedding is to-day, within an hour from now."

"To-day!" he gasped.

"Yes, at Babbingsstone. It's a little village a few miles from Sevenoaks."

Without a word of reply, he caught his hat and dashed from the room, out of the house, and into the square. A cab was passing, and urged on by the excited orders of Ralph the man drove at a gallop to Charing Cross.

There was no train for an hour, but money worked miracles. In twenty minutes a "special" was ready. Twenty minutes which seemed like a lifetime to Ralph, as he paced the platform, and stamped his feet, with the horrible feeling that each wasted moment might mean that she was married.

With a last entreaty to put on all speed, he sprang into the saloon carriage, and the train glided out of the station.

Then, as it did so, the remembrance of a neglected opportunity came over him, and he cursed himself for his blind stupidity. Why had he not telegraphed, and stopped the wedding?

In a second he had torn a couple of sheets from his pocket-book, and, scribbling upon one a few words to Phyllis that he was coming to save her, on another a message to the rector of Babbingsstone that he forbade the marriage, he addressed them both to the Parish Church of Babbingsstone, and, wrapping some money in the paper, flung it upon the platform as the train rushed through a station.

Then he flung himself back upon the seat, and buried his face in his hands. For a second only he

rested, and then rose to his feet again, and wildly paced up and down the carriage. The train was gathering speed, and another station whizzed by. He recognized the country—Chislehurst; then he must be about half way.

Only half way, and, merciful heaven! it wanted but a few minutes to the hour at which the service should commence.

He would be too late. He felt it now, and his wild excitement passed away, leaving him shattered and despairing. All was over, unless his telegrams reached there in time. Fool that he was, not to have thought of them before!

He gazed at the flying landscape with eyes that saw nothing, and over his face there came an expression of deadly purpose.

"The fiend, to force her into this," he cried. "Poor Kiddie! I wonder she did not sooner choose death."

He slowly took the revolver from his pocket and thought for a second of Madeira and their happiness there; and he then examined the cartridges, and replaced it.

"I promised Grace I'd look after Phyllis," he said stonily. "I'll shoot him, before he turns her life into a living hell. Poor Kiddie! what can his power be over her?"

With a roar the train sped into blackness, and crashed through the tunnel. They were nearing Sevenoaks now; but he only shook his head when, out into the sunlight once more, he glanced again at his watch.

Through Sevenoaks Junction with diminishing speed, and then the train came to a standstill in the sleepy country station of Babbingsstone.

"How far to the church?" he asked.

"It's a matter of a mile or so, sir. You can see it from here, on the hill."

With a word of thanks he dashed out of the station, and started

full speed along the winding road that led first to the village, and then up the hill to the church; but his pace soon slackened, the privations of the past few days had been too much for him, and, bitterly bemoaning his weakness, his speed relaxed to a laboured trot, only a trifle quicker than that of the whistling telegraph boy whom he passed.

Outside the inn where Phyllis had stopped the night before, he came to a halt, and paused for a moment to regain his breath.

An ostler stood there, holding a horse, and in a second Ralph had sprung upon his back, and, flinging the man a coin that made his eyes open to their extreme limits, he started up the hill at a gallop.

The rector was still standing at the gate of the church, with a look of trouble on his face.

"My telegram," Ralph cried excitedly, his blood astir again with the gallop up hill. "My telegram; you have stopped the wedding?"

"I have received no telegram."

"Good God! Which way have they gone?"

The rector glanced down the road, and then, as in a second Ralph had reached for his revolver and urged his horse forward, he sprang to the bridle.

"You madman!" he cried.

"What are you going to do?"

"Let go the horse."

"No, you're mad."

"Let go, I say," and again Ralph struck the rearing animal upon the neck. "Let go," he shrieked, his eyes blazing with passion.

"No."

"Then take that, curse you!"

In a paroxysm of fury Ralph had raised his clenched fist against the rector; but swiftly he caught him by the wrist, and held him in a grip like a vice.

"Be a man," he said sternly; and then, while Ralph sat white and trembling, he took the revolver from him and placed it in his own pocket.

The telegraph boy whistled himself up to the rector, paused in the middle of a comic song, out of deference to the cloth, touched his hat and whistled himself away again.

Then Reginald and Judith Brand came from the church, and Judith looked at him, and a jeering laugh came to her lips as she cried, "Too late, Mr. Chesleigh, just a trifle too late."

Ralph did not answer. He sat with eyes dilated, gazing at the pendant on the woman's neck.

"Don't move, on your life," he said in a whisper that held all spellbound. "Don't move," he said again, as he leaped from his horse, and came towards her. "Raise that jewel from her throat," he cried to Reginald, "you've got gloves on. Hold it away from her." And while he spoke he loosened it behind, and held the ribbon in his hand.

Lifting the face of the woman, he gazed narrowly at her neck where the jewel had touched it.

"You're safe," he said.

Judith looked at him in terrified bewilderment.

"I've seen this stone before," he continued. "In South America it was called the Jewel of Death. The setting is hollow, and filled with a deadly poison; a scratch from one of these sharp points is sufficient to cause death. Who gave it to you?"

"Alfred," she answered trembling—"Alfred Brand."

"Then by now he thinks you are within an hour of death."

The woman shook with passion and the fear of death, and then she caught Ralph's hand, and, for a few seconds, whispered in his ear. It was a whisper that transformed his face. The horror swiftly passed, and he dashed towards his horse again.

Reginald stood by the side of the horse, and Ralph took the pliable cane that he held in his hand.

"I'll borrow this," he said grimly, and sprang into the saddle.

"Good luck!" the man answered; and a cloud of dust hid the galloping rider from their view.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AND FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

THERE was a feeling of elation in being upon a horse again, a feeling of elation in chasing a man that brought back to Ralph's memory that long ride in Madeira, when it was Stephen Harrington he tracked for the sake of vengeance.

Now Harrington was beyond his revenge, and he pursued the arch-fiend who had kept the man to the paths of villainy when he might himself have found excuses for turning back.

The despair had vanished from his face, a flush of excitement was upon his cheek, and he swiftly urged his horse along the winding road. They could not be far ahead. They were in a carriage, jogging along to the next village, he riding behind them at a gallop, and any turn of the road might bring them into view.

Yet, with all his might, he encouraged his horse to keep up that breakneck speed, for any turn might bring difficulties upon him, any turn might bring him to a division of the road, leaving him in doubt as to which route he should follow.

So he thundered onward, glancing anxiously before him as he passed a bend in the road, and growing uneasy as his gaze met nothing, for surely, he told himself, by now he should have overtaken them.

At length it came, and just passing over the ridge of a hill of which he was at the bottom he saw an open carriage in which a man and woman were seated.

His chase was over now, and he gave his panting steed a chance

of breathing as they climbed the hill, and put him to the gallop again as they crossed the ridge, and the vehicle, leaving a cloud of dust behind it, was discernable slowly descending the other side.

At headlong speed he tore after it, and as the beat of his horse's hoofs got nearer to those in front the man there rose, and looked back to see who was the madman descending such a hill at such a furious rate. Ralph knew, too, that one false step meant a broken neck; but he realized his horse was sound, and he had galloped hills far worse than this, and so he still urged onwards.

He saw the man lean forward to the driver, and then the brake upon the wheels was released, and, with a sudden start, the carriage plunged forwards, rolling from side to side as it took a curve and almost overturned.

Down the hill, and then along the smoother road at the foot it dashed, and Ralph followed, gaining upon it at every stride, until he could see the white face of the woman he loved, as now and again she glanced back at him; and ever and anon he caught a glimpse of the still whiter face of the man who sat beside her, at one moment rising and shouting to the driver, the next looking back at the ever decreasing distance which lay between himself and vengeance.

"Stop!" Ralph shouted, for they were now within earshot. "Stop!" And he laughed at the efforts of the driver, spurred on, no doubt, by promises from Brand, to increase the space between them.

At an easy gallop now he came behind them, passed the carriage with one look into the girl's face, and catching the bridle of the horse, brought the vehicle to a standstill, and backed it into the side of the road.

"Get out," he said to Alfred Brand, in a voice which turned

his miserable, cowardly heart to water. "Get out!"

"You'll suffer for this!" the man answered, retreating into the furthest corner of the carriage. "What do you mean by it, chasing a man and his wife like a mad-man?"

"Get out," was the only answer that Ralph made, and he advanced towards where Phyllis sat, her face as white as that of the cowardly cur who sat beside her; the tears upon her cheeks, as she looked upon the man she loved, the man for whom she had sacrificed all.

"It's an assault," Brand cried; and then he said no more, for Ralph, stooping swiftly from the saddle of his horse, caught him by the collar of his coat, and dragged him from his seat, over the low door of the carriage, and dropped him in a heap upon the road.

"You noticed that assault," Brand cried to the coachman.

"Drive on for a hundred yards," Ralph exclaimed, "then wait;" and the man took up the reins again.

"Ralph!"

"What is it, Kiddie?"

"Don't make my life worse than it is. You'll understand all presently."

"I understand all now," he answered, and then turning to the coachman repeated, "Drive to the bend of the road, and wait."

"Well, curse me! if you won't get about five years for this, Mr. Ralph Chesleigh," Brand exclaimed, as he scrambled to his feet and looked into the face of his adversary. "Stop a man's carriage, drag him out, and fling him on the road! If I know the law, you'll get it hot. But you can't untie the marriage, even then."

Ralph was fastening the bridle of his horse to a tree, and he turned and looked at the man.

"You can add something else to the assault," he said quietly.

"Oh! What's that?"

"The biggest hiding you've ever

had in your life. I'm going to give that to you now."

For a second Alfred Brand gazed at him; and then like a flash he rushed forward and gripped him by the throat.

The attack was a surprise, and almost a success. Ralph fell back, and Brand pressed his advantage; but the excitement of the last hour, the words that Judith Brand had whispered to him, and the heat of the chase brought back strength and vigour to the man bred in the hard life of a South American prairie, and with a dash he freed himself, and caught his adversary with a grip of iron.

Then he shifted one hand and picked up the stick that he had dropped upon the ground.

Ten minutes afterwards another carriage drew up sharply by his side, and two men sprang out, and looked at the two before them—the one unfastening the bridle of his horse, the other torn and panting, half fainting as he writhed upon the back upon the roadside.

"Your stick," Ralph exclaimed, as he handed it back to Reginald; "I'm much obliged."

"Poor wretch!" the man answered, simply because it was his nature to side with the weaker; and he flung the cane over the hedge.

The rector was bending over Alfred Brand, who lay moaning upon the roadside, and then he lifted him in his arms and carried him to the carriage.

"This is a serious matter," he exclaimed, turning to Ralph. "You had no right to so take the law into your own hands, whatever your wrongs."

"I had the right of a man who has suffered every evil that the world knows because of the cunning of a scoundrel," Ralph retorted. "It was he who attempted to murder the woman I love, attempted to murder me; and then bound and imprisoned me, while he carried his scheme still further,

and forced her, how I know not, to marry him"

"Forced her to marry him," Reginald cried, "because he told her that you had murdered Stephen Harrington, and that was the only way to save your life!"

"Was that it?" Ralph exclaimed aghast. "Poor little Kiddie! And she gave herself, thinking to save me. God bless her!"

He stood silent for a moment, and then turned to the rector again.

"You have heard a fragment, a little, of this man's crimes. Do you blame me now?"

The man shook his head, but still said nothing, for he was thinking that now it was too late.

"Look here," Ralph exclaimed impetuously, misunderstanding his silence, "perhaps there's a girl somewhere whom you're in love with."

The man coloured slightly, either at the pointedness of the remark or from his own consciousness.

"Well, if any man lifted a finger against her, if anyone insulted her, wouldn't you give him a flogging, in spite of your cloth, eh?"

The rector took his hand.

"Yes, that's right," he said slowly, "but——"

"This man has done more than that; his life has been devoted to bringing misery upon the woman whom I love and upon me. I have done as you would have done. It is only the commencement of his punishment. Go with him, take him along, and I will follow."

"You ride your horse," the rector answered, "I will bring her back. Whatever this man's crimes have been, you came too late to prevent what is. She is his wife. No good can be gained——"

"Tush! You're a young man talking like an old one because you feel you ought to," Ralph responded. "Don't you think my love for her is stronger than your philosophy? You'll see the end

of it all presently." And with a nod he turned upon his heel and walked towards Reginald.

"Ride my horse back, there's a good fellow," he said.

"You're Ralph Chesleigh," the man exclaimed; and Ralph nodded.

"If I'd been as strong in mind as you, this would never have happened," Reginald said slowly. "I might have defeated Brand's projects if I had had a grain of pluck or an ounce of sense; but I couldn't. I've been a helpless fool in his hands. I might have guarded and looked after her until you came back, and then she would have thought of me as a man, instead of a——"

Ralph gripped Reginald's hand and held it tightly. "Brand has fooled us all, lad, more or less. You needn't worry about that."

"But it's too late," he answered; "and I would have given my life for her happiness."

There was something in the man's tones which somehow gave Ralph an inkling of the truth, and he scarce knew what to say; and then, "I love her even more than you do," Reginald, he answered. "She has been mine for so long ever since she was a youngster,——"

"Yet you come too late."

"Do you think I would look like I do if I came too late? Do you think I would let that man off with what I have?"

"Do you mean it? Is it true?" he asked excitedly.

"You're a good chap, Reginald," Ralph exclaimed, gripping his hand again.

"God bless you both!" he answered; and, springing upon the horse, followed the carriage.

"One of the best chaps living," Ralph exclaimed, as he watched the departing figure, and then he walked towards where he had told the driver to wait.

Round the curve of the road the carriage that had driven the bridal pair from the church still stood,

the coachman sitting upon his box with an air of such ostentatious indifference that it proclaimed him as having watched the whole proceedings.

Phyllis sat back in her seat, her face buried in her hands, and she did not know that Ralph was so near until he gently drew them away, and looked into her eyes.

Only in these last few seconds had he learned what the girl had done, how she had suffered for him, giving up all for his sake; and now he stood before her, his heart longing to say so much, and yet not knowing what to say.

And she, too, looked into his face, thinking of what might have been for both.

"We'll walk back, Kiddie," he said, and opened the door of the carriage.

"Better not, dear," she answered. "You must go your way, and I must go mine. I said I loved you, and you see how easily I have forgotten you."

"Don't be needlessly cruel to yourself," he answered; "I know now you have sacrificed yourself for me. I begin to understand how he gained this power over you, and you gave up all for me."

"It was necessary that I should marry to get my fortune," she answered, "and with that fortune I was to buy the man's silence. The marriage is but a mockery. Even if you had not overtaken us, we should have separated at the next town for ever. I could not gain the money except by this marriage, even though it only be in form. Now, Ralph, dearest, you know all. Leave me, we can do no—"

"We'll walk back, Kiddie," he answered, and his eyes were misty as he thought of her sacrifice; and then he helped her from the carriage, which turned and passed them on the road to Babbingstone. They walked on together, and no word passed between them for a few moments. She said nothing

because she dare not, and he had no words to utter when he looked at her, and, although not knowing all, conceived what she had suffered for his sake.

Then, because the silence must be broken, he spoke.

"And all this has been for me, Kiddie." He recognized the weakness of his words as he uttered them, but Nature does not give eloquence at moments of emotion. "All for me, because you thought to shield me from judgment, because you thought I had killed Stephen."

"At times I have thought it only justice, and not murder," she answered.

"It was Battent's doing: murder, vile and cowardly," he exclaimed. "God knows I owed Stephen a heavy debt, but not even I would have wished such a death for him."

He spoke thoughtfully, his mind in the past, forgetting the reasons that had brought her sacrifice; and he turned towards her with a start as he heard the cry which came from her lips.

"Ralph," she whispered as he caught her in his arms, "why did you not come to me sooner? Don't you know what I have done?"

"Hush!" he answered, for the horror in her face came like a stab to his heart.

"Don't you know what I've done?" she continued, and a burst of laughter broke off the sentence. "I've married this man to save you because he lied to me and told me you had murdered Stephen, and that was the only way to save your life. He'll be imprisoned; but he's my husband, and you and I are separated for ever."

Again she laughed in a wild, hysterical way, and Ralph caught her in his arms once more.

"Be quiet, Kiddie," he cried, "you're like a baby. There's nothing to laugh in that way for."

You're not his wife; you're not married to him."

Her laughter stopped, and she looked wildly into his eyes.

"Alfred Brand was already married. Judith Brand is his wife; but she consented to your wedding to gain your fortune because money is her god, as it is his."

"Ralph!"

"The whole affair is a mockery, Kiddie. There, dear, there's nothing to cry about—you're as free and as much my own as long ago in Madeira."

CHAPTER XXXIV

HOME

"WHAT on earth have you got that old tobacco-jar out for?" the girl said, looking towards her husband with a smile of enquiry.

"Simply because it's Ralph's," he answered. "There's his tobacco-jar, there's one of his pipes, there's his chair; and he'll come in just as if he'd only been away twelve days, instead of twelve months."

The afternoon sun was blazing down upon Santa Teresa, and the English homestead wore an air of bustle and excitement that had been lacking since the day that Ralph Chesleigh left to fulfil his oath.

Everything had happened just as the two young married women had arranged that it should. All had gone well, and Ralph was now returning; and, as it should be, Phyllis would be with him. He and his wife were coming to Santa Teresa to visit those who had ever kept their memory green.

"Ralph may have changed a little," the girl said softly. "Perhaps we may seem a little strange and even rough to him, coming as he does from England."

The man's eyes opened as she spoke, and he filled his pipe, still looking into her face.

"And Phyllis," she continued,

"she may think we're uncultured and wild. She's so rich that our home will seem a wretched place, perhaps. Don't you think, Dick, you'd better put the jar and pipe away, and wait till Ralph asks for them."

The man lit his pipe before he replied, and then—

"You don't know Ralph," he said quietly. "You don't suppose he's come all the way to South America just to wound old friends, do you? You don't know Ralph, and you don't know Phyllis."

"Well, you don't know Phyllis, dear."

"Don't know Phyllis?" he answered with a laugh. "I know she Ralph's wife, and that's enough for me. She'll be all right. Don't you worry. She's rich, I know that; but we're not paupers."

"But she's terribly, awfully rich dear, and she will feel so strange—"

"No, she won't. God bless you, what are you thinking about? Do you imagine Ralph is going to turn up here in a frock coat and a shiny hat, and his wife in silks and satins and laces and all that sort of rubbish? He'll just be the same as he always was, and you know it."

The man walked towards the door as he heard the sound of wheels, and greeted his comrade with a laugh.

"Time to get off, old chap?"

"Yes, and we shall have to hurry too," the man answered excitedly.

They'd got more than double time to do the distance, but each man's heart was beating to grip the hand of his friend again, the man whose life they had saved so long ago.

"Got any five-shilling cigars on you?"

"Eh?"

"To offer to Ralph. Lottie seems to think he'll expect it."

"Aye, it's the same over the way. Will he despise his old

friends? That's what it seems to me to mean."

"Aye, but he won't, lad, he won't," Dick replied. "We know Ralph. There's only room for two on the front seat, but we'll crowd Phyllis in between us, and drive back in triumph with Ralph hanging on behind."

With a laugh the men clambered into the high-swung trap.

"Tell the children directly we've gone," he cried. "It's a good job they weren't told before, or they wouldn't have slept for a week."

With a dash the horse started, and they bowled along the road towards the new station. The girl watched it out of sight, and then once more returned to see everything was quite right, for, woman like, she could not help thinking that, although everything was the best the now thriving town of Reos could provide, Phyllis might think—well, she didn't exactly know what, but it was so different from Ralph returning alone.

Then, presently, instead of one anxious face, there were two, for the second housewife made her appearance to share in the welcome, and together they pottered about. Dusting where there was no speck of dust, tidying where tidiness reigned supreme, and worrying a couple of inoffensive servants until they actually confided to one another that it would have been a good thing if Mr. and Mrs. Chesleigh had never left England at all.

But the children had to be told, and then all thoughts of Phyllis vanished in the energetic task of keeping them in bounds, and preventing them from rushing down the road hours before any one was due. They did not wonder if he had changed. They only danced at the thought that Uncle Ralph was coming back.

Then, at last, over the brow of the hill, in the warm evening light,

the trap appeared. Dick was right: Two men sat in front with a girl in the centre, and standing at the back was a man waving his hat as he caught sight of the children running towards him.

The two who were so anxious could see it all from where they stood.

Down he sprang with a rush before the one who drove thought to pull up the horses, and in a second the children were all around him. The next instant the girl was out as well, down almost on her knees in the dusty road, her arms caressing the baby of the two families.

This was the girl they had been so nervous about; they both felt almost a little ashamed, as they saw her there and heard the laughter, carried by the breeze, at some remark which Ralph had made.

They saw Ralph stoop to swing the baby on his shoulder, and laughed themselves as they heard the shrill sound of dissent from her ladyship who ruled the household. So Ralph had to be contented with carrying another of the group, the baby trotted by Phyllis' side, and almost at a run they covered the distance between them and the house.

Then the two girls who were so doubtful simultaneously found an arm around their waists, almost simultaneously discovered that the rich girl's husband was kissing them before the eyes of his wife, that their own husbands were evidently enjoying it, and everyone was talking at the same time.

What pretty little speeches of welcome to Phyllis those two girls had mentally rehearsed, but no one even introduced them to her!

Ralph simply finished embracing them and passed them on, and no one had time to say anything. One minute Ralph was kissing them, and the next they kissed Phyllis.

"Give Ralph one of those five-shilling cigars, Lottie."

Ralph was undoing a box he had taken from the trap, and he looked up in bewilderment; but Lottie was not to be caught. She knew how things were now, and brought down the despised tobacco-jar and pipe.

"It's home, that's what it is," Ralph said gravely, and, as he took his old pipe and filled it even the children were silent.

"It's home, that's what it is, Kiddie," he said again.

"It's home," she said, "something I have never known before."

"You light your five-shilling cigar, lad, and don't talk like that, or we're all so happy we shall be snivelling in about five minutes."

"Aye, you're right," he answered, "there's nothing to feel down about now, is there?"

"O—o—oh!"

It was simply an indescribable exclamation of admiration from the baby of the family, which started in a whisper and ended in a yell; but when a child has been born and bred in South America, and is without a moment's warning given a queen amongst dolls from the Lowther Arcade, excesses are pardonable.

By the time the box was empty the room might have been the Lowther Arcade itself, and then Ralph turned to his companions with a look of mock despair.

"I've quite forgotten you boys. Phyllis remembered the girls she had never seen, but I've overlooked you."

Then he laid a hand upon the shoulder of each.

"You understand, lads," he said, "sometimes one is so grateful that to attempt to show it more than in one's heart seems to be

wrong—like placing a price upon one's gratitude. I can give you nothing ever but my love. It's a strange word from a man to men; but I mean it, for you saved my life and gave me all the happiness that is mine."

The children shouted over their marvellous toys, but the others stood there silent.

"Might at least have given us a five-shilling cigar," one said.

It's the Englishman's theory, laugh when one feels like crying; but it serves—they all laughed, and all understood each other.

"What's that joke about five-shilling cigars?"

"Ask Lottie."

But Lottie looked too embarrassed to be questioned, and so the conversation flew to other things until later, when the children had gone, and then Ralph told them all that had happened since he left them—of Stephen Harrington who died for his crimes, of Alfred Brand who now suffered for his, and of Judith who lived, spared by the law of the land, only a prey to her own conscience.

The hours flew as he told them all the story, told them what Phyllis and he had passed through and how they had determined to seek rest, for a while at least, in what had been his home, that she might hold to her heart the happiness of being with those who loved her.

He finished. To him it seemed he had been talking only for minutes, yet it was for hours.

"Now it is home," he continued, after a moment. "It's rest and peace. Good-night."

Lottie walked across the room, drew the curtains from the window, and the rising sun threw a beam of light upon their faces.

"The night is gone," she said, "see, now it is the dawn."

THE END

Butler & Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, Frome, and London.

201a²
a.8.

DR. J. COLLIS BROWNE'S CHLORODYNE

ORIGINAL AND



ONLY GENUINE

The Original and only Genuine

Is admitted by the Profession to be the most wonderful and valuable remedy ever discovered.

Is the best remedy known for **Coughs, Colds, Consumption, Bronchitis, Asthma.**

Acts like a charm in **Diarrhoea**, and is the only specific in **Cholera and Dysentery.**

Effectually cuts short all attacks of **Epilepsy, Hysteria, Palpitation and Spasms.**

Is the only palliative in **Neuralgia, Rheumatism, Gout, Cancer, Toothache, Meningitis.**

CAUTION.—Vice-Chancellor Sir W. PAGE WOOD stated that Dr. J. COLLIS BROWNE was, undoubtedly, the Inventor of CHLORODYNE.

BEWARE OF IMITATIONS.

Sold in Bottles at **1s. 1¹/₂d., 2s. 9d., 4s. 6d.** None is genuine without the words "**Dr. J. COLLIS BROWNE'S CHLORODYNE**" on the Government Stamp. Overwhelming Medical Testimony accompanies each bottle.

Sole Manufacturers : J. T. DAVENPORT, Ltd., LONDON.

Distinguished everywhere
for Delicacy of Flavour,

EPPS'S GRATEFUL—COMFORTING COCOA

Superior Quality, and
Highly Nutritive Properties.

A Remarkable Offer !

A TEST HOROSCOPE FOR ONE SHILLING.

This unique offer is made to advertise "MODERN ASTROLOGY," and prove to sceptics that Astrology is true.

To convince every one that we have confidence in our ability to give a reliable TEST Horoscope, we will refund the money sent to us if the Horoscope is not true.

Send a Postal Order for One Shilling, or 14 stamps, with the time, date, sex, and place of birth, but if you do not know the hour of your birth, send the date, etc., and we will satisfy you.

Address S.E., EDITOR "MODERN ASTROLOGY,"
9, Lyncroft Gardens, West Hampstead, LONDON, N.W.



3/- & 5/- post free.

Sold by all Stationers.

Are Penholds of Ink, and the next best thing to a

'SWAN' FOUNTAIN PEN.

Make writing easy, and are the best
STYLOGRAPHIC PENS.

WRITE FOR CATALOGUE, FREE.

MABIE, TODD & BARD, Manufacturers,
93, Cheapside, 95a, Regent Street, W.
London, Manchester and Paris.

EE**EE**

STEEDMAN'S

SOOTHING



POWDERS

FOR CHILDREN.

IN USE OVER 50 YEARS.

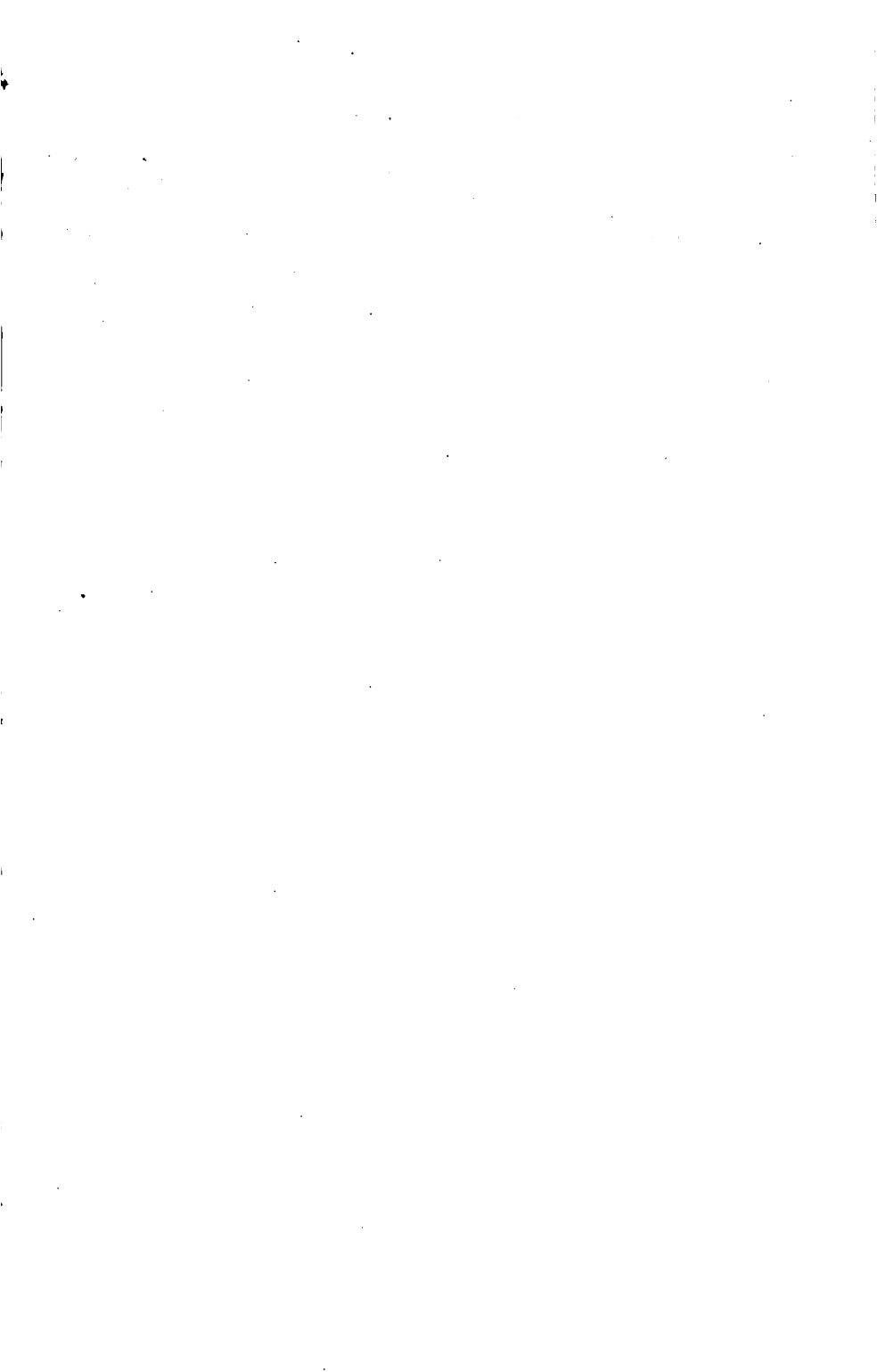
Relieve Feverish Heat, Prevent Fits, Convulsions, etc.;
Preserve a Healthy State of the Constitution during
the Period of Teething.

The name Steedman is always spelt with **EE**, and, in
purchasing, please pronounce the word **STEEDMAN**
as it is printed.

EE

WALWORTH,
SURREY.

EE



THE NEW YORK PUBLIC
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT

**This book is under no circumstance
taken from the Building**

B'D APR 13 1977

